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DURHAM UNIVERSITY

The Multiplicity of Being:  
John Clare and the Art of 'Is'

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Nova Banton  
2015

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Department of  
English Studies

## Abstract

John Clare has sometime been regarded as a poet that demonstrates the characteristics of naïve poetry according to Schiller's definition. This had led to ideas that Clare is resistant to philosophical readings and theories. Through careful consideration of the workings of his poetry, this thesis argues the reverse case. It asserts that Clare writes ontological poetry and poetry which 'thinks.' This thinking can be illuminated by the existential ontological concepts of Martin Heidegger, together with his later writings which interpret poetry as the language of Being. The chapters are organised to bring out the diverse and interconnected implications of these assertions. After the introduction which, among other things, defines key Heideggerian concepts, such as *Dasein*, *Throwness*, *Gelesenheit*, *The Open* and 'Thinking', the initial chapter discusses Clare as a poet of Being according to Heidegger's criteria and definitions. Clare is compared to Hölderlin, Heidegger's ultimate philosophical poet. The chapter discusses Heidegger's definition of *essential* poetry and subsequently emphasises its characteristics and traces them through Clare and Hölderlin. The next two chapters present Clare's poetry as it conforms to Heidegger's ideas of 'pure poetry' using the *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1927) as exemplification. The first of these chapters uses the poems from 'January' to 'June' to reveal what Heidegger describes as the *unconditionedness*, or the unconditional and unconditioned intelligibility of Being's essences. In chapter three the thesis demonstrates how Clare's poetry, from 'July' to 'December', corresponds in its methods to the way in which Heidegger takes the noun 'thing' and transforms it into a verb. Chapter four addresses two treatments of Being within Clare's nature poems. The first idea is that of nature as *aletheia*, a Greek word which Heidegger interprets as the disclosing of 'truth.' The second idea is that of Human Being. The ideas are linked in that nature as truth becomes a synonym for Clare's own being. Chapter five sees Clare as a poetic thinker,

probing the existential significance of life. Chapter six discusses Clare's writing about *Being-in* the world and *Being-with* others. The chapter highlights the irony of Clare as a poet of place who can find no sense of home. Clare uses poetry to alleviate his ontological homelessness. Clare's later excursions into existential ontology lead to chapter seven and a discussion of the poet's ontological shift to the Eternal. The final chapter compares Clare and Wordsworth as philosophical poets. An Appendix glosses key terms from Heidegger, in support of and cross-referenced to the expositions offered in the Introduction and elsewhere. Overall, the thesis explores and affirms the value of Clare's work as an embodiment of ontology as a mode of thinking made possible by poetry.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to all who have contributed to this thesis.

To Professor Michael O'Neill for his guidance, unwavering support and hard work, Kostas Boyiopoulos and Jason Haynes for their help on all things technical. To Davina Orr Ferguson for her constant support, understanding, kindness and love. To my family...for everything and ultimately to God, the Supreme Being.

## Notes on the Poetry Editions of John Clare

How to edit Clare's poetry is a question that has resulted in contrary positions amongst scholars. There are those who believe that his work is best served by minimal editorial intrusion.<sup>1</sup> Against this, is the position that justifies amendments in the belief that such corrections help Clare to appeal to readers in the future. Both positions suggest the difficulty of choosing an edition of Clare since each draws on compelling facts that legitimise their claims.

The practice of applying punctuation to Clare's texts by Clare's editor, John Taylor, is viewed by critics such as Eric Robinson and P.M.S Dawson as highly contentious since it 'impose[s] alien rhythms on his poetry.'<sup>2</sup> Eric Robinson maintains that Taylor 'distorted Clare's work by his editorial interventions, alterations and corrections; destroying its authenticity to make it conform to metropolitan notions of polite literature and stylistic decorum.'<sup>3</sup> Robinson defends the practice of including Clare's rustic idiom and his provincialisms. He explains that 'many of what have been taken as Clare's misspellings are to be found in dictionaries of the period', and he calls for more intensive study of Clare's dialect, Scots, and Middle English vocabulary in the context of contemporary usage.<sup>4</sup>

P.M.S Dawson expresses similar concerns regarding editorial practices that are too 'excessive.'<sup>5</sup> Too much editing, he believes, 'change[s] the nature of his writing.'<sup>6</sup> 'To make

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<sup>1</sup> 'I always wrote my poems in great haste and generally finishd them at once, wether long or short for if I did not they generally were left unfinishd what corrections I made I always made them & never could do any thing with them after wards.' Taken from John Clare, *John Clare's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Eric Robinson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983) 86.

<sup>2</sup> P. M. S Dawson, 'John Clare.' *Literature of the Romantic Period: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 167-172 (167).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Dean, 'John Clare: Freedom & Enclosure', 'review', of *'I Am': The Selected Poetry of John Clare*, by Jonathan Bate, *The New Criterion*, 22 (2003): 1-8 (3). 23 Sept. 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Robinson, 'Editing Clare: Words' *The Wordsworth Circle*, 34.3 2003: 140-5 (143).

<sup>5</sup> P.M.S Dawson 'John Clare', 167.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

Clare speak correctly was to give him a different voice.’<sup>7</sup> Thus, Dawson too, has come to prefer publishing Clare ‘as an exact reproduction of what the poet wrote, with minimal correction of obvious errors.’<sup>8</sup>

For his part, Tim Chilcott<sup>9</sup> also calls into question aspects of Taylor’s critical practice. Taylor had not a trained literary eye, so would excise sentences or stanzas that he thought superfluous or anomalous to the poetic context. Nevertheless, Chilcott works to vindicate Taylor’s editorial role and provides a more intimate insight into their working relationship. Taylor had to bring Clare’s work in line with the expectations of contemporary audiences.<sup>10</sup> Thus, during the correspondences between Taylor and Clare, it is clear that Taylor’s decisions were not dictatorial and ‘the texts that resulted were by and large agreed between them.’<sup>11</sup>

Taylor’s decisions had consequences for Clare’s work which involve issues of selectiveness; they raise the question of how the true voice of John Clare can and should be heard in relation to the constraints of patronage, editorial revisions and bias. Robinson and David Powell believe that Clare is best served by texts based on his manuscripts and regard Taylor as one who bowdlerised Clare’s texts, ‘sacrificing continuity and characteristic detail in the process.’<sup>12</sup> Robinson and Powell’s editorial practice also extends to restorative measures. By this it is meant that Robinson and Powell attempt to achieve a comprehensive

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Tim Chilcott, *A Publisher and His Circle: The Life and Work of John Taylor, Keats’s Publisher* (London: Routledge-Kegan Paul, 1972).

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of the editorial relationship that existed between John Taylor and John Clare, please see the chapter ‘Taylor and Clare 1819-37’ in Tim Chilcott, *A Publisher and His Circle*, 86-128.

<sup>11</sup> Hugh Haughton, ‘Revision and Romantic Authorship: The Case of Clare’, *John Clare Society Journal*, 17 (1998): 65-73 (67). Hereafter, *John Clare Society Journal* will be abbreviated to *JCSJ*.

<sup>12</sup> See Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield, ‘John Taylor’s Editing of Clare’s *The Shepherd’s Calendar*’, for specific exemplification of this matter. *The Review of English Studies*, 14: 56, 359-69. In this article, Robinson and Summerfield demonstrate Taylor’s inconstancy and ‘slashing’ practices as editor (359). They, like other commentators, discuss not only Taylor’s dilatoriness, but his admittance to losing the ending of ‘May’ in 1826. However, the final editorial choices of the first version of *The Shepherd’s Calendar* is attributed to a then young poet called Harry Stoe Van Dyk who had been employed by Taylor to oversee the editing of Clare’s chaotic texts when they had thoroughly frustrated Taylor. See Edward Storey, *A Right to Song* (London: Methuen, 1982) 193 and Jonathan Bate, *Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador-Pan Macmillan, 2004) 296-98, 303, 309, 324, 349, 487.



representation of Clare's corpus. Relying on the Northampton and Peterborough manuscripts, the nine volumes available in the Oxford editions (*Early Poems*, 1989, first three volumes of the *Poems of the Middle Period*, 1996, volume four 1998, volume five 2003 and the *Later Poems*, 1984), under their direction, include stanzas that were dismissed by Taylor, (including the whole month of 'July' which Taylor discarded from *The Shepherd's Calendar*, (1827), along with poems that had been languishing in obscurity, and those that had been omitted from previous editions.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the completion of the Oxford editions makes available all known Clare poems to Clare scholars.

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<sup>13</sup> Clare's critics and publishers are all too familiar with the vicissitudes of his relationship with his patrons which has had a lasting influence on John Clare the literary object. Mrs Eliza Emmerson (1782-1847) and Lord Radstock (1753-1825), were magnanimous benefactors. But in exchange for their patronage, they curtailed Clare's poetry and his poetic ambitions. Moreover, they made suggestions and at times, demanded that Clare to write in a way that would not offend contemporary middle class society and religious sensibilities. Lord Radstock's diligent industry on the poor and obscure poet's behalf, greatly enhanced Clare's efforts to become known and to secure subscriptions for his poetry. For his services, however, Radstock became involved in Clare's relationship with his publisher and from his pious background, objected to poems being published he considered distasteful. Two instances serve as prime examples of Radstock exerting his influence. Writing to the *Morning Post*, Radstock expressed his discontent with 'Dolly's Mistake' (1821), a comic ballad about extra-marital sex and 'My Mary' (1821) on account of stanzas three and six of the latter containing a rude word and a rude implication on the rhyme 'kisses it.' (Quoted from Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, London: Picador-Pan Macmillan, 2004, (164). First published New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. The 2004 edition will be used throughout the thesis). As a result, the third edition of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) was basically the same as the second edition, except that the two offending poems were omitted such as the poem 'The Country Girl' which was left out of the second edition. The ramifications could be seen in the changes to the Contents and the *Glossary*, but not in overall repagination.

The type of patronage Mrs Emmerson procured also had its censorial elements. But the major impediment to Clare proved to be her oppressive didacticism and her omnipresence in all of Clare's affairs. (See Bate's biography for a more detailed account). Due to her sensitive nature, Clare had to amend sentences in the poem 'Accursed Wealth' (1821) for they seemed seditious and against the middle classes that were so willing to help him. Hence, the fourth edition of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (Autumn, 1820) saw the offending lines of this poem left out because of the pressure Emmerson and Lord Radstock had put on Clare (threatening to disown him) and Taylor. To deepen Clare's feelings of disenfranchisement a little further, Mrs Emmerson suggested that Clare write a poem on gratitude for Lord Radstock to make amends for the 'radicalness' of his lines. Clare duly acquiesced and his enforced deference embodied in the sentence 'And sav'd a wormling from destruction's fate.' (3.4) has forever been captured in the poem 'To Lord Radstock' (1820). Quoted from John Clare, *The Early Poems of John Clare 1820-1822*, eds. David Powell Eric Robinson and Margaret Grainger, vol.2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 413. Nevertheless, Mrs Emmerson's friendship with Clare was not as negative as some Clare scholars would have it. Whilst maintaining her moral agenda Emma Trehane, ('Emma and Johnny': The Friendship between Eliza Emmerson and John Clare", *JCSJ* 24 2005: (69-77) brings into sharper focus just how central Mrs Emmerson's support was to Clare. 'It was Eliza', Trehane writes, 'who would urge him [Clare] to transcend the limits of his genius by encouraging him to publish some of his new and unobserved poems, demonstrating her faith in his work and her adventurous spirit' (71). More importantly, Trehane makes the point that Mrs Emerson provided valuable literary criticism to Clare's poems rather than hindering his desire to experiment. As Trehane remarks, '....it was Eliza's part in the episode of Clare's political polemic in the poem 'Helpstone' (1821) that has caused her to be so badly judged as someone merely wanting to gain kudos through her friendship with a poet, rather than offering a sincere friendship' (75). It is significant that Trehane also clarifies is the role of Mrs Emmersom in the episode of Clare's political polemic in the poem 'Helpstone' (1820). In antithesis to 'the degree of scepticism Clare scholars hold in relation

It remains the case that Clare's manuscripts require transcriptions, organisation and editing if they are to achieve publication. Taylor was granted the authority by Clare not only to add punctuation and correct grammatical errors, but also to make selections for forthcoming volumes. Indeed, the epistolary exchanges between the poet and the publisher<sup>14</sup> disclose the imposition on Taylor that he felt resulted from Clare's dependence upon him.<sup>15</sup>

Zachary Leader's chapter 'John Taylor and the Poems of Clare'<sup>16</sup> attacks those scholars who demonise Taylor as an editor. Outlining Clare's reliance on Taylor, a reliance Leader refers to as 'extreme'<sup>17</sup>, he re-describes the relationship between the two as one of inter-dependence. The thesis of Leader's chapter is that 'Clare may not have approved all Taylor's revisions, but he expected his poems to be revised.'<sup>18</sup> 'It is not the case', he writes, 'that unrevised or manuscript versions are the versions Clare would have wanted published.'<sup>19</sup> Leader is convinced that the positions of those who advocate a 'raw Clare' have much to do with sentimentality or the 'Romantic notions of poetic autonomy'<sup>20</sup> which serves the 'Romantic undervaluing of secondary processes.'<sup>21</sup> Whilst Clare came to resent the restrictions on his work, as Leader demonstrates, he actively requested that his spelling be corrected. This must be strictly differentiated from his requests for his provincialisms to

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to Mrs Emmerson' (70), Trehane makes clear the difficult position she was placed in. When Lord Radstock 'demanded that the offensive lines in the poem be removed he chose Eliza to relay his objections. Being true to her old friend, Eliza did as she was asked' (75). Thus, the light Trehane sheds on her relationship with Clare allows for the conclusion to be drawn that the shared friendship was more beneficial to Clare than other accounts have previously conveyed.

<sup>14</sup> John Clare, *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> 'If I could have found any one who would [have] taken the Editing off my Hands, I would gladly have given them 100£.' John Taylor writing to Clare, 29 Aug. 1821, quoted in Chilcott, *A Publisher and His Circle: The Life and Work of John Taylor, Keats's Publisher* (London: Routledge-Kegan Paul) 97.

<sup>16</sup> Zachary Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authorship*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 'John Taylor and the Poems of Clare', 206-61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 211.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 208.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 213.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

remain<sup>22</sup> but, Leader asks, ‘would he thank his modern editors (Robinson, Dawson, Powell and Grainger) for faithfully preserving his errors and inconsistencies?’<sup>23</sup>

Jonathan Bate espouses the idea that editing Clare is tantamount to his poetry being ‘interfered’<sup>24</sup> with. Bate believes that ‘the best way of doing justice to his “rude way” was to publish it in the unpolished form.’<sup>25</sup> And yet, Bate seems to caution Clare’s modern editors to be mindful of Clare’s ability to attract future readers. For this to happen, some modifications to Clare’s irregularities, he believes, are necessary. However, they must not move Clare too far away from his own intended sentiments. Bate’s position is demonstrated in his own edition of some of Clare’s poems which makes use of slight punctuation.<sup>26</sup> John Goodridge echoes a similar concern when reviewing the Oxford editions. Goodridge, in his observations, does make the point that the Oxford Editions ‘are very weak, however, on literary information. Even the most striking intertextual resemblances are ignored.... [this] may reflect the general move towards reading Clare in relation to popular and folk culture.’<sup>27</sup>

Although the Oxford editions have the potential to erase the contributions of those who helped Clare’s development, they allow readers to become an editor, punctuating according to how they hear Clare. The lack of punctuation does not seem to interfere with reading Clare; rather, it seems to make possible moments of greater clarity because the rhythm of the poetry is allowed to emphasise the diction and to activate the punctuation which is intrinsic within Clare’s rhythms and metre. The presence of an independent literary

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<sup>22</sup> J.W. and Anne Tibble discuss Clare’s list of instructions to his editors about the editing of his texts. The phrase ‘egs on’ (6.4) in the poem ‘Address to A Lark Singing in Winter’ (1815) acts as the operative for Clare to defend his use of what he believed to be natural language rather than local dialect. He writes, ‘Whether provincial or what I cannot tell; but it is common with the vulgar, (I am of that class,) and I heartily desire no word of mine to be altered.’ Quoted from J.W. and Anne Tibble *John Clare: A Life* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1932) 124. Poem quoted from John Clare, *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, eds. David Powell Eric Robinson and Margaret Grainger. vol. 1. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 99-101 (100).

<sup>23</sup> P.M.S Dawson, ‘John Clare’, 167.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador-Pan Macmillan, 2004) 205.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Selected Poems of John Clare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> John Goodridge, ‘review’ of John Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vols. 1 and 2, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), *British Association for Romantic Studies Bulletin*, 13 (1998):15-16 (16).

existence has subsequently manifested itself within Clare's work that leads to very important notions of authenticity. For these reasons, the editors of the Oxford editions are able to provide challenges to the claims that they perpetrate the traditionally received image of John Clare as a rudimentary labourer poet whose identity, inevitably, is bound up with the language of his locality.

If Eric Robinson's lead is to be followed regarding a closer linguistic inspection of Clare's dialect, Clare's semantics and etymology could be read outside of the 'tyranny of grammar' as his local dialect could be shown to have a primal contact between the thing that is talked about and its origin. This type of thinking has the potential to disseminate a different discursive qualification in Clare which supports the idea that his dialect language is closer to its source because of its orality, its 'earthiness', its organicity. As Barbara Strang writes, 'Clare's language is composed from the most diverse elements: literary, archaic, elevated, borrowed, familiar, dialectical, and invented.'<sup>28</sup>

What this suggests, as a matter of consequence, is that 'the unique timbre of Clare's voice, his dialect and syntax and even the shifting idiosyncrasies of his scribbled manuscripts, has revealed him to be a very different poet to the one hitherto published...'<sup>29</sup>

In light of such presences and for reasons of scholarly completeness, the thesis will privilege the nine volumes of the Oxford editions. If, as is argued in the thesis, John Clare is a poet reflecting Being, then fundamental metaphysical concepts such as self-consistency, identity and pure existence dictates the necessity for the texts to be read in their 'textually primitivist' states. As Heidegger clarifies, 'Origin here signifies that from which where and through which a thing is what it is and how it is.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Barbara M. Strang, 'John Clare's Language', in *The Rural Muse*, second edition, ed. R. K. R. Thornton (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-Northumberland Arts Group and Carcanet Press), 59-73 (61).

<sup>29</sup> Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips, 'Introduction': relocating John Clare, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Origins of the Work of Art', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 15-88 (15).

That said, the author is aware of other editions and of the value of their efforts to aid a better understanding of the poet through punctuation where the syntax is unclear. This is exemplified throughout the chronology of Clare's published poems. An illustrative list follows which is by no means comprehensive. J.L. Cherry (*Life and Remains of John Clare*, 1873), Gale Norman (*Clare's Poems*, 1901), Tibble editions (1935), (*Selected Poems*, 1990), Simon Kovesi (*John Clare Love Poems*, 1999, *Flower Poems*, 2001), Jonathan Bate (*Selected Poems*, 2004), Simon Sanada's complete e-text of Clare's four volumes of poetry which provides punctuation to allow one way of understanding what Clare originally composed (2007), Paul Farley (*John Clare: Selected Poetry*, 2011), Tom Pohrt (*Careless Rambles*, 2012).

The trend to add punctuation remains amongst Clare's more recent editors as in the case of the latter example. This trend however remains 'appropriate' and 'careful' (although in the case of Pohrt, this is not always the case)<sup>31</sup> as opposed to the heavy hand of the Tibble editions (1935) which, in Clare studies, has been generally perceived to be 'unreliable.' Contentious editing such as this helps to solidify the decision to read Clare through his own words, without artificial processes, repression and the desire to make him socially, morally and politically acceptable.

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<sup>31</sup> Pohrt's editing style, has the potential to be conceived as a slightly overzealous in its efforts 'to tidy Clare up.' For example, in *Careless Rambles*, Pohrt replaces the word 'God!' with 'heavens' and the word 'brig' with 'bridge.'

## **Notes on References to Heidegger's *Being and Time***

As one reads through *Being and Time* (1927), two sets of numbers appear on each page such as 100:10. This, according to Heidegger's translators John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, is indicative of the pagination of the original translation in German. Therefore, throughout the thesis when references from *Being and Time* are cited, they appear as a double set. The first number refers to the page number at the top (100), the second refers to the original text of the particular section that is being quoted.

## Introduction

The natural and ecological observations in his poetry such as finding birds' eggs and nests off the beaten track, wildlife searching for food, rural labourers at work, or the fragile beauty of flowers: all provide fuel for the traditional notion of John Clare (1793-1864) as a poet *par excellence* of the English countryside. His descriptive poetry from his early volumes (1820-22) provides much evidence to show that Clare's work particularised the local and the near-at-hand. Prioritising the energies of natural phenomena appears to justify claims by John Keats<sup>1</sup> and *The London Magazine*<sup>2</sup> that his poetry was 'purely descriptive.'<sup>3</sup> John Barrell provided a fuller treatment of this issue. He considered the differences between the leading eighteenth century poets who intertwined thought and philosophic views in their landscape poetry and Clare who, arguably, does not.<sup>4</sup> Barrell's study animated the debate regarding how the Schillerian distinction between the 'naïve' (descriptive and unreflective) and the 'sentimental' (modern and philosophic) should be applied to Clare.

Critical accounts of Clare as a naïve Schillerian poet have overlooked the possibility of his work enjoying 'sentimental' status. It has been argued that his poetry lacks sentimental characteristics such as the psychological complexity discernible in, for example, Wordsworth or Shelley. Clare's poetic practice was to capture in words, the profusion of 'the objects of

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<sup>1</sup>Although Keats and Clare were never to meet, Taylor showed Keats a copy of Clare's 'Solitude.' Keats' review of the poem included an observation which revealed his conviction that 'the Description too much prevailed over the Sentiment.' Quoted from Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador- Pan Macmillan, 2004) 189.

<sup>2</sup> *London Magazine*, I (January 1820), 7-11 (reprinted in Mark Storey ed. *John Clare: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1973) 35-42.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Storey, *The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1973) 68-73. For a detailed response to the reception of Clare's first volume of poetry and how the various opinions shaped Clare's future reception as a poet, see Mark Storey, 'Clare and the critics,' *John Clare in Context*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 28-50.

<sup>4</sup> John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (London: Cambridge UP, 1972).

nature fulfilling their function in a pure presence.’<sup>5</sup> According to this line of argument, the richness of his locality is depicted ‘within a presentness that is its own, total world.’<sup>6</sup> The imagery conveyed in poems such as ‘A Lair at Noon’ (1821) and ‘The Wheat Ripening’ (1819-32) are testimonies to Clare’s economy of directness, clarity and detail; but also, it is often claimed, to his ‘naïve’ approach. The fusion between emotion and images is not explicitly expressed by Clare. And yet lines such as ‘The hawthorn gently stopt the sun beneath’ (1) and ‘The water whirled round each stunted nook’ (5) from ‘A Lair at Noon’, provide a space in which the described enters a synthesis of philosophy and the visionary.

Lines such as these, grant Clare an opportunity to comment like Wordsworth, on aspects of human nature. Yet, the poems do not provoke Clare’s consciousness whereby observation becomes reflection. This also seems to be the case for ‘The Wheat Ripening.’

The style of a ‘snap shot in time’, not only captures the density of imagery in the poem, it also emphasises the way the poem acts similarly to Wordsworth’s ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge’ (1802). Both poems, take their cue from the ontology of the scenery and articulate their writers’ descriptions into words that must bear the weight of their momentary ecstasies. Both Clare, and Wordsworth, maintain the experiential vitality of their verbal pictures by means of their active walking through their scenes with their eyes. Nevertheless, the commonalities the poems share begin to become less certain when their different rationales and technique bring themselves into focus. Clare is captivated and subdued by his focus on objectivity and offers no moral or philosophical statement that is potentially humanly significant. Wordsworth writes out of a sentimental aesthetic, as the city is imaginatively apprehended and life is presented in suspended animation.

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Chilcott, ‘A Real World & Doubting Mind’: *A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull UP, 1985) 68. Hereafter, ‘Real World.’

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 18.



The various approaches employed by Clare's commentators – which include a focus on Clare's textual complexities<sup>7</sup>, on his presentation of acoustic detail<sup>8</sup> and on the analysis of themes within Clare's poetry<sup>9</sup> testify to the way they have sought and employed a number of methods to defend their poet from the criticism that he writes like 'a camera not a mind.'<sup>10</sup> Their strategy has been to focus on Clare's intimate involvement with, and unequivocal interest in, the transition of language into poetic diction and poetry into a poetic structure.<sup>11</sup> What has emerged is a fuller awareness of Clare's art or what Mina Gorji refers to as his 'artful artlessness.'<sup>12</sup> This approach, however, neglects what takes place in Clare's visual apprehension and technique as he transforms nature into poetry. The temporality of art is suspended and Clare does more than convey. His poetic experience and active consciousness become affected by his diction together with 'the rapid associations of his shifting [perception and] thought.'<sup>13</sup>

Clare's poetry exemplifies what the aesthetic philosopher Arnold Berleant terms 'an aesthetics of engagement.'<sup>14</sup> It offers participation in, rather than detached observation of, his local environment. Aspects of the poetry demonstrate a subjectivity that is not superficial, because it is submerged in the concentrated presentation of objective reality. Critical responses that have examined Clare's descriptive vision attest to such an observation. Such

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<sup>7</sup> An example of this is provided by Edward Strickland, 'Conventions and their Subversion in John Clare's "An invite to Eternity"' *Criticism* 24.1 (1982): 1-15.

<sup>8</sup> Sam Ward, 'Presentation of Sound & Song in the Poetry of John Clare', PhD thesis, Nottingham Trent University, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See M. Jillings, Time and Related Themes in the Poetry of John Clare, M. Litt, Stirling University, 1977, Simon Kövesi, *Sexuality, Agency and Intertextuality in the Later Poetry of John Clare*, PhD thesis, Nottingham University, 1999 and John Vaughn Gordon, *The Theme of Isolation in Clare's Poetry*, MA thesis. U of Durham, 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'Nature in Poetry', review, of *Madrigals and Chronicles: newly found poems by John Clare*, ed. Edmund Blunden (London: Beaumont Press, 1924), *Sunday Times*, 5 October 1924, 8 cols. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Please see Andrew Hodgson, 'Forms and Feeling in John Clare's Sonnets' *JCSJ* 31 (2012): 51-66. Hereafter, *John Clare Society Journal* will be abbreviated to *JCSJ*.

<sup>12</sup> Mina Gorji has borrowed this idea from John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton who write of the art behind John Clare's artlessness in *John Clare the Trespasser in John Clare in Context*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 87-129. Gorji uses the phrase in chapter one which is entitled 'Artfully Artless' in Mina Gorji's *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008) 15-31.

<sup>13</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* (New York: Oxford UP, 1947) 30.

<sup>14</sup> Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) 13.

scholarship has undermined Clare's simplistic and self-confessed approach of finding 'his poems in the fields and merely writ[ing] them down.'<sup>15</sup>

William Howard's discussion of Clare's technique in his chapters 'The Poetic Eye' and 'The Poetic Process as Structure'<sup>16</sup> has continued the balanced assessment of Clare's poetry. Howard's study, which partly addresses the systemised creativity of Clare's aesthetics, rejects accounts of Clare as a poet of 'natural simplicity'<sup>17</sup> close to the 'peasant poet model.'<sup>18</sup> It also achieves a serious evaluation of Clare's poetic practice. Howard's thought has certainly helped to alter the direction of criticism on Clare owing to his identification of a presence of an artistic theory regarding Clare's writing. Earlier, Barrell makes clear that the distance between Clare and Schillerian sentimentalism is not as great as had been perceived previously. 'By explicitly linking Clare's detailing of locality with his personal commitments and investment of emotion', Barrell 'formulate'[s] a theory which understands description as an act of commitment and self-expression.'<sup>19</sup> Hugh Haughton further suggests that 'there are a number of ways we might be able to break out of the Schillerian critical impasse, to expose the limits of conventional criticism and celebrate the liberating openness of Clare's centrifugal poetics.'<sup>20</sup> Arguing that Clare's poetry is not 'symbolically agile but is configurative in its reach and implications',<sup>21</sup> Haughton states that Clare is a 'sophisticated and self-conscious writer'<sup>22</sup>, and progresses to outline ideas with which to 'test' Clare's poetic self-consciousness.'<sup>23</sup> One of the ways in which Haughton performs this 'test' is to consider Clare's aesthetics of description. This is also the route Mina

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<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey Grigson, ed. *Poems of John Clare's Madness* (London: Routledge-Kegan Paul, 1949) 57.

<sup>16</sup> William Howard, *John Clare*, Twayne's English Author Series, 312 (Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall, 1981).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Graves, 'Peasant Poet', *Criticism*, 8:1 (1955) 99-105 (104).

<sup>18</sup> John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) 87.

<sup>19</sup> Juliet Sychrava, *Schiller to Derrida: Idealism in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 89.

<sup>20</sup> Hugh Haughton, 'Progress and Rhyme: "The Nightingales Nest" and Romantic Poetry', *John Clare in Context*, eds. Geoffrey Summerfield, Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 51-86 (52).

<sup>21</sup> Haughton, 'Progress and Rhyme', 53.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*.

Gorji pursues in the wake of Haughton, when she discusses the wider context of eighteenth century traditions as they endured and evolved in the Romantic period.<sup>24</sup> Haughton also suggests the usual practice of a comparison of Clare with his contemporaries. Comparing Clare's recorded sayings about nature and the natural world with the canonical Romantic poets, makes it possible to argue that he is 'a poet evolving a philosophy of poetry and of nature such as Wordsworth's or Coleridge's.'<sup>25</sup>

For her part, in *Schiller to Derrida: Idealism in Aesthetics*<sup>26</sup> Juliet Sychrava challenges dismissals of naïve poetry on the grounds that it 'lacks' or fails to participate in exemplifying the creative mind interacting with nature. Sychrava devotes her final chapter to John Clare, and she shows the poetry to be as fertile and inventive in its figurations as any other poetry while it persists in its local concerns. Such critical strategies have proven to be fruitful in trying to determine how to read Clare's poetry. But it must be recognised, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, that a substantial part of Clare's poetic output engages, at least implicitly, with existential and ontological concepts. He validates his own poetry as sophisticated or sentimental through the channels of a heightened consciousness that stream throughout his work. Reflecting on 'truths' that are prompted by nature and human nature, what is revealed in Clare is writing that presents the 'is' in nature and the 'there-is' of existence. In Heidegger's terms, Clare approaches the question of Being through the 'saying of the unconcealedness.'<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, what has become almost axiomatic in Clare studies is that Clare is not a philosopher, nor does he write philosophical poetry. Even when connections are sensed between poetry and philosophy, they are downplayed. Tim Chilcott, discussing Clare's crisis of identity and the ontological vacuum in the poetry from his Northampton asylum period

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<sup>24</sup> Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Haughton, 'Progress and Rhyme' 52.

<sup>26</sup> Juliet Sychrava, *Schiller to Derrida: Idealism in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Origins of the Work of Art', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 15-88 (74).

(1837-64), observes that Clare's dark poems of self-consciousness echo 'Heidegger's obsessive and haunting question: why is there something rather than Nothing? However, this is not to imply that any of the poems are philosophical in nature or design, or that any of them explicitly prefigures the details of existentialist thought.'<sup>28</sup> Focusing on the shared experiences and commonalities within the nature poetry of William Wordsworth and Clare, W.J. Keith writes:

...Wordsworth's poems about the effect of the natural landscape upon man are more varied and more profound...he sees into the heart of things .....When he is at his most characteristic, Clare is content with nature as it is. The mind of man is decidedly not his haunt...his poems are 'filled with flowers' rather than with 'works of human kind. Moreover, he makes no attempt to probe beyond experience towards a mystical or metaphysical superstructure...It is absurd to speak, as Harold Bloom does of "Clare's dialectic"; such terminology is inappropriate, not one hastens to add on account of any snobbish assumptions about the quality of Clare's education or the capacity of the rustic mind, but because his very real poetic intelligence is simply not conducive to any kind of abstract categorization. Clare has to be protected from those on the one hand who would see him as an untutored peasant and those on the other who would romanticize him into a natural philosopher.'<sup>29</sup>

Whilst there seems to be no reason to argue with Keith's claims for Wordsworth, his rationale for thinking about Clare and his poetry requires some discussion. Keith's position that 'Clare is content with nature as it is' and at times, presents 'a less intellectualized alternative to Wordsworth'<sup>30</sup>, demonstrates the gap traditionally detected between Wordsworth and Clare. Keith's perspective reveals a failure to grasp Clare's poetry's 'subtle aura of association'<sup>31</sup> with the traces of continuous human experience and the wholeness of presence. From the texture and language of the poetry itself, it becomes possible to speak of an ontological discourse within the *saying*<sup>32</sup> of Clare's poetry. The naturalised language that

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<sup>28</sup> Tim Chilcott, 'Real World', 204.

<sup>29</sup> W. J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1980) 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>31</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot: An Essay on the Nature of Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1947) 52-53.

<sup>32</sup> The source of the 'saying' is Being and 'arrives in human speech or "language" (the media of philosophy and poetry) and is conceived as a reiteration of the saying of Being.' Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism'. Ed. D.F.

speaks of the essence of things and not their concepts, is able to be translated as Clare's poetry's agency of 'the keeping of its nature.'<sup>33</sup> Clare's poems, like any other poems, are subject to 'abstract categorizations'; whether it is how Clare presents the land,<sup>34</sup> his perception and apprehension of natural scenes and objects,<sup>35</sup> his 'divinisation of nature'<sup>36</sup> or how 'Imagination and Artifice' shape his literary production and physical landscapes.<sup>37</sup> If philosophy is used as literary criticism, or in the case of Clare, if philosophy is used to provide a language for Clare's artistry of ontology, Harold Bloom is right, there is a dialectic in Clare; a dialectic that discusses Being in two of its most fundamental conceptions.

The rigour of philosophy is to arrive at or offer possible solutions to questions which are abstract in nature. Poetry deemed naïve is perhaps best understood as resistant to philosophy and theoretical abstraction and does not invite philosophical hermeneutics. Therefore, to collapse naïve poetry into philosophical thought can be seen as a futile exercise. On the contrary, philosophical thought and theories can be very much to the point when they are appropriate. Philosophical thought and theories can be very much to the point when they are appropriate. In the case of John Clare, this appropriateness shows its relevance most clearly when he is read and discussed through the fundamental ontological concepts of Martin Heidegger. The philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) which refutes 'the traditional conceptual machinery in favour of idiosyncratic categories'<sup>38</sup> illuminates the undervalued philosophical dimension in Clare. Heidegger's phenomenological existential

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Krell *Basic Writings* (London Routledge, 1978) 213-265 (217). As Heidegger puts it, 'We are trying to listen to the voice of Being.' 'What is Philosophy?' Trans. W. Kluback and J.T. Wild (London: Vision, 1958) 89.

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger, 'The Thing', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 164-86 (184). The 'said' in language is 'an instrumentalist conception of the language in which it is couched as an objectifying instrument of dominion over beings and a forgetfulness of the receptive dimension to authentic speaking.' Guy Bennett-Hunter, 'Heidegger on Philosophy and Language', *Philosophical Writings*, 35 (2007): 5-16 (9).

<sup>34</sup> Bob Heyes, 'Triumphs of Time': John Clare and the Use of Antiquity' *JCSJ* 16 (1997): 5-18.

<sup>35</sup> Tim Chilcott, *A Real World & Doubting Mind: A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull UP, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> Greg Crossan, *A Relish For Eternity: The Process of Divinisation in the Poetry of John Clare* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1976).

<sup>37</sup> Paul Chirico, *John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 138-58.

<sup>38</sup> Beth Bjorklund, Review of *Heidegger and the Language of Poetry* by David A. White, *MLN* 96:3 (1981) 716-18 (717).

thought proves germane to Clare's poetry when Clare writes about *being-in-the-world*. Similarly, Heidegger's work on poetic ontology which for him, is the language of Being encapsulates what lies at the heart of Clare's descriptive poetry.

The idea that this poet of love and nature demonstrates a philosophical sensibility may seem too far removed from the familiar arguments about Clare's ruralism or his status as a naïve poet. For readers of Clare, it may prove difficult to deal adequately with the dual challenge inherent in Clare's poetry. The difficulty appears to be located in his poetry of descriptivism that does not express the poet's views, and that draws attention less to feeling and attends more to the immediacy of objects. On the other hand, amongst the delightful scenes and landscapes are poems that exhibits traits of existentialism and questions that relate to his inner perplexities. Therefore, the essence of Clare's poetry is movement, flux and process, a refusal to be pinned down to one position.

Clare's invocation of the philosophic is by no means intermittent or episodic. A large body of Clare's poetry is a response to his immediate environment or the world around him. Moreover, Clare's nature poetry shows how it revels in its own nature. This is how Clare occupies two simultaneous positions within this thesis, a philosophical poet and a poet of Being.

Another facet to Keith's contention is that Clare's 'very real poetic intelligence'<sup>39</sup> does not prove that Clare is a philosopher. Heidegger asserts that for *Dasein* or 'there being' to become an '*authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole*'<sup>40</sup> its resoluteness<sup>41</sup> must be achieved through the distinguishing of and gaining itself from Inauthenticity. *Dasein* should avoid

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<sup>39</sup> W. J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), Trans. of *Sein und Zeit*, 1927, 349:302.

<sup>41</sup> Resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) is for *Dasein* to free itself from having a public conscious and takes up its own possibilities. Resoluteness is the mode by which *Dasein* is disclosed to itself as wanting to act according to conscience. Resoluteness is a willingness of *Dasein* to project itself into situations in which it may experience *Angst*. Resoluteness is a freedom from fear, and it is an acceptance of *Angst* as an existential possibility. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 345:299-348:301.

prioritising the present and its ordinariness. Rather, it should have at the fore of its thinking, its Being and temporality. On account of Clare's thinking about life, what it really is and how it will end, he fulfils Dasein's anticipation of its 'ownmost authentic possibility'.<sup>42</sup> Whilst Clare is not a philosopher in the sense of having designed a recognised system of theoretical paradigms, he is a thinker. A philosopher by definition is someone who thinks and tends to think about life, the meaning of life or the bankruptcy of meaning in life. Continuously mediating between earthly and heavenly existence, Clare does not think upon the meaning of Being *qua* Being, the type of thinking that is to be found in metaphysical thinkers such as Parmenides.<sup>43</sup> Rather, as his poems show, he asks traditionally philosophical questions as he thinks through the idea of where his ultimate reality lay. This is only natural to *Dasein* whose 'Being be an issue for it'.<sup>44</sup> As a poetic thinker, Clare on numerous occasions throughout his poetic output, shows life to be a gloomy episode. Life's purpose, he believes, is to familiarise the individual with dejection and disappointment. Clare's philosophical inquiries can also be said to follow the philosophy of a 'lived experience' as he confronts existence and *being-in-the-world*. In addition, a philosopher can also be said to be someone who constructs an admirable theory about a culture<sup>45</sup>, ideas about how literature can be read<sup>46</sup> or existence itself as in the case of Heidegger. In the case of Clare, dialogues take place between poetry and philosophy. In doing so, Clare characterises the crucial role of a poet outlined by Heidegger. Thus, philosophical appropriations namely Heidegger, provide a context for poetic ontology in Clare and his oppressive sense of environment. It is precisely when he is discussed in the

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<sup>42</sup> *Thrown* is an ontological term Heidegger uses in *Being and Time*. It relates to *Dasein* coming into the world and its Being. Please refer to the term *Thrownness* in the *Glossary*.

<sup>43</sup> Parmenides' surviving work is an unfinished poem entitled 'On Nature' and describes his two views of the nature of reality.

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 69:44.

<sup>45</sup> Burrhus Frederic Skinner has shown that there are more people living in *de facto* slavery worldwide today than during the height of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. When societies converge morally, it's usually because one has dominated the other. See Burrhus Frederic Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (London: Harmondsworth-Penguin, 1973).

<sup>46</sup> For example, how the generation of meaning through the primacy of context over text in novels can be attained. See M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: four essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Texas UP, 1981).

context of philosophical theories that Clare is opened up to new readings and new significance.

‘What but poor shadows that blank night obscures / As the grave hideth & dishonours thee.’ These lines (13-14) from a poem entitled ‘Death of Beauty’ (1828-29)<sup>47</sup>, exemplify Clare doing more than describing. He is in the mode of reflecting. His theme is that of the passing of beauty. The poem addresses the impact of time on nature and the plight of being in Being. Its theoretical orientation is to raise itself above the immediacy of what it projects locally to come to rest upon beauty as a universal concern. What follows is an example:

The sun by which they glittered in the morn (4)  
Now thou art gone the fairey rose is fled (1)

Conscious meditation allows Clare to create several layers of implication as he suggests the inevitability of the loss of beauty and the loss of life. When Clare outlines ‘Vain joys what are they now their suns away’ (12), he seeks to illustrate the transience of all things in Being and time. Beauty is not immutable, remaining the same irrespective of time passing. This idea is enacted in the sun, a symbol being used as that thing which denies and neglects and as a result, brings about misery and decay:

Now thou art gone their pride is withered  
The dress of common weeds their youth bewray  
Now vanity neglects them in her play  
Thou wert the very index of their praise  
Their borrowed bloom all kindled from thy rays  
Like dancing insects that the sun alures

(5-10)

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<sup>47</sup> John Clare, ‘Death of Beauty’, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.4, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P. M. S. Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 177-78.



Clare's simultaneous perception and understanding of beauty are apparent. The inseparable link between description and apprehension is revealed in the poem's evaluative quality. Clare is not simply a poet, but a speaker philosophising the substance of abstract concepts through a very deliberate response. Humanity is brought to its basic level and is shown to be vulnerable against the ravishing of time. Time does not gift favours to anything or anyone. The language of the poem is effective in communicating the dependence of humanity on exterior traits in which to obtain a sense of beauty and feelings of worth. For the flowers it is the sun, and when it has gone, their pride or, 'the very index of their praise' withers and leaves them unlovely like 'Common weeds' (6). The imagery of 'withered' suggests atrophy and decay. It is made even more pronounced when Clare sets it against the vitality of the 'dancing insects' being allured by the sun's rays (10). What is also vital in the poem is Clare's accent on the verb 'borrow.' The beauty of the blooms that vanity entices the flowers to seek, and then neglects, is on loan and is taken away by time reducing the aestheticism of the fairey rose to the dress of ugly weeds. The relevance to humanity cannot be excluded for long. According to Clare's encounters with the natural world, and, according to his thinking, beauty is vanity. To seek after beauty is shallow and is done in vain since the grave ultimately will dishonour every effort for the human and the weakening of the sun will destroy the beauty of the flowers.

It is my aim to show how Clare's poetry is a witness of philosophical truth. Through meditative reasoning, existential experience, and consideration of the beautiful, Clare communicates what exists in his consciousness. The thesis endeavours to exhibit the poet's sophisticated synthesis of apprehension and ontological occasion. The central argument of the thesis is that John Clare is at once a poet of Being and a philosophical poet. The philosophical ideas that Clare treats are commensurate with Heidegger's existential ontological concepts laid out in *Being and Time* (1927) together with the philosopher's later

thinking about poetry in accordance with the concept of ontology. A large section of Clare's poetry answers to the role that Heidegger prescribes for poetry as well as the literary impulses associated with *bringing forth* and *letting-be*, or, in other words, what is intimately linked which is poetry's own authentic *saying*. This type of poetry in Clare, manifests something always more than itself. At the core of Clare's poetic essence, is poetry that illuminates the presence of the 'unsaid' in a fluidity of 'is.' His language privileges the natural and the organic. Everything is permeated with Being and traces its contours. When writing as a philosophical poet, the existential Clare illustrates an ontological presentation in his notions of Being, worldliness and *being-in-the-world*; and these notions can be glossed by turning to Heidegger; they are even spoken into a second existence by Heidegger. Thus, the claim I make in this thesis is, in essence, this: what Heidegger says philosophically, Clare exemplifies poetically.

The thesis places Clare in two positions at once, poet of Being and philosophical poet. Showing himself as a poet of Being, Clare's poetry revels in itself, exemplifying Heidegger's thinking on the relationship between ontology and poetry. Writing as a philosophical poet Clare records the individual's confrontation with existence and being in the world. Clare's account of his poetic self, reveals what Heidegger would later outline as '*Dasein* in its there.'<sup>48</sup> Hence, it would be quite wrong to read Clare's frustration and hopes for financial betterment and literary fame as reasons for his existential ontological disposition. To obtain a fuller comprehension of Clare as poet, philosophical thinker and as an individual, it is appropriate that the critic turns to Heidegger. The philosopher's thinking about the uncanniness of the world, other people, isolation and confronting death is all relevant to Clare. In particular, it shed light on his understanding of what it is to be and to be in the world. Heidegger's concepts not only serve to interpret Clare's expression and experience of

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 184:144.

being fixed and embedded in the world, but they also help to articulate how Clare's language brings forth the idea of how things call their essences to themselves. Reading Clare through philosophy, namely Heidegger, provides a conceptual space in which to understand Clare's work more deeply.

Examples such as E. Walls' *A dialogue between Phenomenology and Poetry: Reading Heaney and Hopkins through Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty*,<sup>49</sup> *(Extra)Ordinary evenings in New H(e)aven: the religious element in the poetics of Wallace Stevens*, by D. L. Bird<sup>50</sup> and Brian Willems' study of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Heidegger<sup>51</sup> are testimonies to the fecundity and intellectual value of reading poets in relation to philosophy and specifically Heidegger's work. The named poets have been subjected to a firm conception of new possibilities in what seemed initially to be a strange and unfamiliar place. This I believe, holds much validity for Clare.

A range of Heideggerian technical terms and concepts will be incorporated within the thesis. Terms such as the *Open*, *The Thing*, *Ereignis* and *Gelessenheit* provide the critic of Clare's poetry with useful ways of approaching questions regarding the origins and nature of Clare's poetry. These terms are analysed and explored within the first section of the thesis. These terms (which are explained in the *Glossary*) relate to Heidegger's conceptualisation of how art detaches itself from hermeneutics and cultural understanding and moves towards the releasement of a 'dynamic nothingness.'<sup>52</sup> Within this section, Clare demonstrates his credibility as an *essential* poet. Such a poet provides audible expressions of what is in existence as it comes into poetry.

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<sup>49</sup> E Walls, *A dialogue between Phenomenology and Poetry: reading Heaney and Hopkins through Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty*, PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> D. L. Bird, *(Extra)Ordinary evenings in New H(e)aven: the religious element in the poetics of Wallace Stevens*, PhD thesis, U of Glasgow, 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Brian Willems, *Hopkins and Heidegger* (London: Continuum, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> This phrase stems from the idea of 'nakedness' in Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) who writes about the spiritual experience with God. He terms this experience as the 'pure nothingness that culminates in a pure experience.' This is 'dynamic' because it allows the believer to become free from the distraction of the multiplicity of the will. Sermon XV, 'How a Radical Letting Go Becomes a True Letting Be', *Breakthrough, Meister Eckhart's creation spirituality, in new translation*, ed. Matthew Fox (New York: Image Books, 1980) 213-18 (15).

In the second section of the thesis, terms such as authenticity, inauthenticity, facticity, *Thrownness*, Projection and *The They* will be used to prove how Clare's existential thought both responds to, and reflects, Heidegger's phenomenological existentialist account of *Dasein* and its *Being-in*. Authenticity refers to the remembrance of Being by the individual and their place in it. Inauthenticity, according to *Dasein's* ontological existentials, is when *Dasein* allows itself to be ruled by Others and be content for the Others to determine their ontological mood or, way to be in the world. The Others distract *Dasein* from remembering its existential temporality. *Dasein* becomes absorbed in these Others and lives inauthentically, not remembering its temporality. Facticity refers to the ontological state of *already-being-there* and the term *thrownness*, is interpreted as coming into the world and being delivered over to 'the there' of *Dasein*. The term *The They*, refers to those *Daseins* who live their lives according to social 'norms' and are the Others who accommodate *Dasein's* forgetting of itself. Projection is inextricably linked to existence and is also a type of *throwing*, but it differs from *Dasein's thrownness* in that it is performed by *Dasein* itself.

When the state of Being is referred to as "*Being-in*" [it] is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of *Dasein*, which has *Being-in-the-world* as its essential state.<sup>53</sup> *Being-with* is the term Heidegger uses to explain the 'fact' that *Dasein* must be with other *Daseins*, things and the world.

For all of Heidegger's obscurity, his thoughts on the ontology of the poetic give a voice to what dwells in the essence of poetry. Heidegger's renunciation of grammar, in favour of a complex idiom and composite neologisms, also provides the reader of Clare's poetry with a means of grasping its particular way of being poetry. The thesis goes beyond other studies which have, at their core, intellectual approaches which discuss Clare according to theoretical contexts. Paula Clark Rankin explores Clare through a variety of identifications

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<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 80:54.

and rests her focus on Clare's quest for self-identity.<sup>54</sup> Ronald Link identifies Clare's modernist voice and modernist tendencies in his argument that Clare is governed by the beginnings of a modernist sensibility. Link also relates to Clare's preoccupation with existence as he contends that 'By accepting existence as it is, Clare was able to escape the burdens of the self and the isolation brought about by the imposition of self on reality.'<sup>55</sup> Link, nonetheless, does not convey a fully satisfying account of the intricate relationship of Being to be found in Clare's poetry.

It is a study entitled *The Fearful Vision* by Louis Joseph Masson<sup>56</sup> in conjunction with Timothy Morton's essay 'John Clare's Dark Ecology' which helped to prompt the thesis' interest in Clare and Heidegger. Morton reads Clare's poem 'I am' in accordance with ideas surrounding place, location and environment. 'To be', and to be somewhere, led to the discipline of ontology and to the ontological concepts of Heidegger. Masson, however, provides a full treatment of Clare's darkening vision which, he argues, became fearful. From shining nature to the dull place of death through a movement from exterior to interior worlds, Masson documents the cruelty of time which led to Clare's alienation and what he calls Clare's 'retreat poems.'

To present Clare as a poet of Being and a philosophical poet, poems from Clare's entire career have been consulted. This decision helps to validate the claim that the philosophical Clare is to be found throughout his work. To showcase the presence and creativity of Being in his nature poetry, poems have largely been selected from Clare's early period (1820-27) together with some poetry that belongs to his middle period (1827-37). Furthermore, throughout all the chapters, poems from his later period (1837-64) have also

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<sup>54</sup> Paula Clark Rankin, *John Clare's Quest for Identity*, PhD thesis, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, 1984, *DAI* 45 (5), 1410A.

<sup>55</sup> Ronald W. Link, *Toward the Abyss: Modern Elements in the Poetry of John Clare*. PhD thesis, U of Miami, 1976, Ann Arbor: UMI, 1976, ATT 302836579, 1-304 (ii).

<sup>56</sup> Louis Joseph Masson, *The Fearful Vision: The Poetry of John Clare*, PhD thesis, University of Syracuse, 1972; *DAI*, 33, 279A.

found their way into the chapters' discussions. The discussions of Clare's poems do not follow the chronological ordering of his poetic periods. Rather, they, as well as the chapters, are aligned with Heidegger's ontological career in reverse.<sup>57</sup> The initial chapters' arguments coincide with Heidegger's later thinking on poetry, language and thinking itself. The later chapters embrace the early existential ontological concepts found in *Being and Time* (1927) and its relevance to Clare when he is in philosophical mode.

It is important to first demonstrate Clare's relationship with Being and with Heidegger on the premises of poetry. From the beginning, the thesis sets out to accentuate the primacy of Clare being read against an ontological theme. Heidegger's essays, '*The Origins of the Work of Art*' and '*The Thing*' from *Poetry, Language, Thought* grounds the idea of a poet of nature and the dwelling of Being in poetic words that utter presencing and privileges the natural and the whole. In addition, it is a logical decision to highlight the critical relation between Clare's later poems from the asylum with his thinking about human Being at the end of the thesis.

## II

It can be argued that presenting Clare through the concepts of Heidegger's philosophy is not an exclusive critical endeavour. The reasoning and argument of textual independence and demonstrating the presence of an existential sensibility can be applied to other poets. Moreover, the claim could be made that reading Clare in this way, is simply a matter of Clare having been appropriated in Heideggerean terms. To address these matters, what must be considered are the prepositions 'over', 'through' and 'in.' Heidegger's philosophy has not

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<sup>57</sup> Heidegger's existential ontological analytic of *Dasein* as well as his concepts about thinking and philosophy, occupied Heidegger's first and early publications. In the thesis, this forms the later section. Heidegger's work on language, poetry, and art came later in his career. The thesis begins with a discussion of Clare using Heidegger's later thought.

been laid ‘over’ Clare’s work like a palimpsest to the point that Clare is only visible through the veil of Heidegger. For all the insights that Heidegger’s language brings to Clare’s poetry, the poetry retains its own character and agency. Heidegger’s language of conception, of bringing forth, does not ‘over’ shadow what exists in Clare. It is not an appropriating medium that hovers ‘over’ and threatens to usurp the poetry’s holding of its emptiness. Heidegger’s language highlights in Clare’s poetry, ‘text-ness’, and the distance of the text from its ‘text-ness.’ In this between, are the acts of presentation and re-presentation. Clare’s poetry hence, reveals the naturalness of how it locates what is outside of it as it shows the ‘it’ of itself or, in other words, how it embraces and consists of its own individual and personal characteristics.

Here, one can distinguish between appropriation and application. To appropriate is to make a thing one’s own. To apply something is to connect one thing to another. Heidegger’s thinking cannot appropriate Clare. The purity of the fundamental character of self-sustenance which determines the poetry’s essence *qua* essence resists such a practice. Clare can only be read ‘through’ Heidegger as the latter provides a language to articulate the ontological dynamics within Clarean poetry.

To address the preposition of ‘in’: what exists in the poetry is what it maintains and how it is poetry. Its own poetic ontology is its nature. These movements and performances in Clare’s poetry as Being’s creative void, are illuminated by Heidegger. Once they are able to be expressed, what is ‘in’ Clare is what Heidegger brings to cognition as the *logos* of the poetry.

The thesis seeks to read Clare’s poetry in the manner of its occurring, how it is able to say itself: in Heidegger’s term, its ‘unconcealedness.’ It is in this way that Clare’s poetry is able to occupy the realm of the ontology of the poetic. To have explored Clare’s melancholy, depression episodes or his madness would not have illuminated Clare’s ‘lived’ philosophy. Clare’s poetic achievement is served less well by biography (although, for chronological

purposes, the thesis will include biographical references) than is often recognised. The intellectual density behind the carefully observed details of *being-in-the-world* is different from the poetry of the asylum or, crudely phrased, ‘mad Clare.’ The philosophical Clare provides a wholly different dialectic.

Although we can know a little of the influence of other poets on Clare’s writing,<sup>58</sup> it is not clear if Clare was ever helped in his philosophical thoughts by any philosophical works he read. It can only be surmised that he was familiar with established works from philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, Francis Bacon and the empiricists that will be discussed shortly. If this is the case, the thesis maintains that they bear no significant relevance to the philosophical Clare in light of what he analyses and what Heidegger helps him to articulate. Although Heidegger focussed on poetry in his later writings, he did not turn his thoughts to Victorian poetry. And yet, the philosopher and the poet illustrate one another in their analytical discussions regarding the uniqueness of an individual’s position as a human *being-in-the-world* and poetry as the language of Being. In Clare’s portrayal of *what-ness* and *what-is*, his poetry mirrors what Heidegger’s terminology would describe as phenomenal existentialism and fundamental ontology. It is in this way, that Clare’s poems have been explored and read in the thesis.

The disposition of Clare’s poetry’s as an event of Being (*ereignis*)<sup>59</sup> embodies the actuality of poetic essence; something that is and has not been created alongside what poetry is able to create. Clare’s poetry, with its ontological sensibility, yields through its stillness, its diction and its aesthetic dimensions, a poetics of *ontopoēsis*.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Greg Crossan, ‘Clare’s Debt to the Poets in his Library’, *JCSJ*, 10 (1991): 27-42. Also see Eric Robinson, ‘John Clare’s Learning’, *JCSJ*, 7 (1988): 10-25 and Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* 102-06.

<sup>59</sup> See *Glossary*.

<sup>60</sup> The central feature of the word *ontopoēsis* indicates the coming into Being or, the presence of ordering in the unfolding of existence. In the context of Heidegger’s poetic ontology, it takes the meaning of a self-induced production dependent only upon the self-creating activity of Being.



Detailed comparisons with Wallace Stevens and T.S. Eliot could have conveyed further convincing evidence of the intricacy that exists between Clare's creative techniques and those of Stevens and Eliot. This would have provoked the ontological fecundity in Clare to be more pronounced. However, to communicate the argument that Clare is a thinking poet in his own right whose thoughts are lucidly expressed by Heidegger, Stevens and Eliot were only alluded to and intermittently referenced. Stevens' use of non-systematic philosophical ideas to explore conception and meaning in poetry has lent to Clare, an effective measure to structure meaning. Stevens' simulation of Heidegger's disclosure and perceptive awareness of Being in his own poetry provides an example of what sometimes Clare causes us to think about. Is poetry an extension of philosophy? Or is philosophy an extension of poetry? Eliot's contribution to Clare in this thesis comes in the form of the literary reflecting the real. By this, it is meant that the existential comparisons between Clare and Eliot's fraught and despairing bachelor J. Alfred Prufrock assist in glossing Clare's own feelings of solitariness and existential pointlessness.

### III

In this section, the philosophy of a selection of nineteenth century English philosophers contemporary to Clare, receives some attention. The purpose of this section is to provide some justification for the belief that German twentieth-century philosophical thought lends a more suitable lens in which to read and appreciate the philosophically poetic Clare. It will look at Heidegger's refutation of Western metaphysics since pre-Socratic theorists and how he posits his phenomenological existentialism over and against the traditional focus on objectivity, perception and consciousness. For him, the original question regarding the presence of essences is not epistemological but ontological. This creates the pathway for

Heidegger's concepts of 'there' and *being-in-the-world* which illuminates the different presentations of Being in Clare.

Existentialism advocates that life is more than logic, more than the Cartesian notion of the *cogito*. It is lived existence. Hence, the subjective and personal must be made paramount whilst the objective and the intellectualised must be depreciated. For Heidegger, the word 'existential' is most appropriately placed in the expression existential phenomenology, a term he uses to describe *Being and Time* (1927). Initially, this self-description is perplexing given that Heidegger repudiates and insists on positing some great distance between his thought and existentialism which can be read in 'Letter on Humanism.'<sup>61</sup> Yet, phenomenology becomes existential for Heidegger in overcoming the Cartesian tradition towards the conduct of life and more importantly, the impetus he places on his denial that human existence can be modelled upon that of things or substances. Using his criticisms of Edmund Husserl's conclusions in *Logical Investigations* that the self, in the shape of the transcendental ego exists outside of the empirical world, Heidegger offers an interesting variant. He argues that the world does not come to the individual through perception. Human beings are in the world and they 'cannot imagine themselves worldless.'<sup>62</sup>

In the second chapter of *Being and Time* Heidegger introduces an account of his philosophical method which he calls 'hermeneutic phenomenology.' The term 'phenomenology' is here taken to mean the actual revealing of the truth about phenomena in the world by examining them. He writes 'The term "phenomenology" means primarily a concept of method...The title "phenomenology" expresses a maxim which can be formulated thus: "To the things themselves."'<sup>63</sup> Yet, the phenomenon which has to be revealed is not the pure essences of objects as it is for Husserl, for Heidegger, it is Being. The method thus

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<sup>61</sup> Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Routledge: London, 1993) 217-65.

<sup>62</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 55:82.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 34:58.

sketched at the beginning of *Being and Time*, is phenomenology only in a new and perhaps loose sense of the word. It is, in fact, existentialist phenomenology, designed to open the eyes of *beings-in-Being* to their true position in the world.

His famous rejection of the 'Existentialist' title in '*Letter on Humanism*'<sup>64</sup> is intended both as a response to and an effort towards differentiating his work from Sartre's 'Existentialism is Humanism.'<sup>65</sup> Along with distancing himself from Existentialism, it was also Heidegger's intention to extract his thought and work from the foundations of metaphysics by suggesting that metaphysical language had been misappropriated, misinterpreted and misused. This he believed, led to fundamental errors of investigation within Western philosophy. Heidegger further suggests that the area metaphysics centralises is incapable of arriving at the proper subject matter of philosophy which is fundamental ontology because it fails to recognise absence for presence. This type of metaphysics is, by its very nature, excluded from the experience of Being. Western Metaphysics always represents Being using the context of what Being has already manifested itself as. Hence, Heidegger's principal issue with Sartre's existential humanism is that, while it does make a humanistic 'move' in privileging existence over essence, 'the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement.'<sup>66</sup> By this Heidegger meant that Sartre's well-known and well-used mantra simply reverses Platonism (with its preoccupation with the question 'what is?') and is therefore still a form of metaphysics rather than a fundamental ontology.

Heidegger also progressed to reject existentialism and phenomenology on the basis of the impossibility of Husserl's phenomenological reduction. Heidegger recuperated the question of Being from Western metaphysics which concerned itself with the desire to know and contain Being as a totality. Heidegger also eschews references to consciousness and humanity (and even the term 'I' is shunned to avoid any metaphysical assumptions) and

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<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 217-65.

<sup>65</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, Trans. Phillip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1948).

<sup>66</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 232.

instead employs the term *Dasein*. However, he retains the method of existential phenomenology. The study of human existence is paramount for Heidegger. Such a statement is easily detectable when Heidegger gives primacy of thought to *Dasein* whom he also refers to as 'there being' or 'being there.' *Dasein* has a pre-ontological understanding towards Being and an ontological relationship with the world because essentially, it is in the world and cannot be separated from it.

Nevertheless, Heidegger's existential ontological thought proceeds from Husserl's numerous, multifarious and sometimes ambiguous and misleading aims to phenomenologise the world. Despite Husserl's aim to fill in the gaps he identified in Descartes, he refers to his renewed discussion of phenomenology as 'a twentieth-century Cartesianism.'<sup>67</sup> This relates to the similarity between his doctrine of 'bracketing' the world', and Descartes' resolve to doubt everything in which he had hitherto believed, the physical world included. Yet, Husserl's 'bracketing' procedure is not only confined to suspending belief in all physical reality, it also includes a much more radical move which is to bracket the natural human ego. This leaves behind a pure consciousness upon which the purified essences are to be revealed. Thus, the notion of an 'I' is rendered obsolete as it becomes reduced to the transcendental ego. The corollary of 'bracketing', is to have produced a 'purified consciousnesses', cleansed of any pre-knowledge, beliefs or assumptions about the existence or nature of things beyond that which is 'immanent' to this consciousness.'<sup>68</sup> The issue of 'bracketing' becomes clear. Reality has undergone a 'phenomenological reduction' to a supreme and self-contained realm of essential being. It is self-contained because essentially it has become independent from all Being, a world or nature as it is without need of these for its existence. Effectively, according

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<sup>67</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, Trans. Peter Koestenbaum (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975) 3-39 (3).

<sup>68</sup> Although Descartes distinguished the '*ego cogito*' from the '*res corporea*' he erroneously viewed the *cogito* on the basis of contingency. Husserl observed that the *cogito* was related to other substances by 'a principle of causality. Contingency would mean that consciousness might never have been directed, and objects might never have been accessible to consciousness.' David E. Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 47.

to the Husserlian method, the phenomenologist has become a methodological solipsist, so must also take the radical step of having to ‘set aside’ or bracket existing individuals because humans are also subjects of empirical entities. It matters not for Husserl whether or not a person actually exists, the transcendently purified consciousness must be ignorant of human essences for the purposes of essential intuition.

To access the ‘true’ essences of an object, Husserl explains that the act must *intend* an object and this directedness or act of intentionality is the essential feature of consciousness. He writes ‘Every intentional experience –and this is indeed the fundamental mark of all intentionality, has its ‘intentional object.’<sup>69</sup> Such concentrated particularity is what an existentialist aims to criticise. Husserl’s implication that the realm of consciousness is independent and self-contained is based on the premise of the ‘non-participating spectator of [the individual’s] acts and life.’<sup>70</sup> It is not denied that the human Being’s practical activities in the *Lebenswelt* (the Lifeworld) incorporate beliefs and conceptions, but for Husserl ‘the credentials of such beliefs and conceptions can only be determined by placing them and the activities in which they are embedded, under the spectatorial gaze of a detached, passive intellect.’<sup>71</sup>

For the existentialist, as for Heidegger, this view is impracticable, unfeasible and heavily reliant on paradox. Husserl’s technique to arrive at ‘What is?’ and ‘What is present?’ asks for a real unreality to substitute for real possibilities. Sense cannot be made of a world that is logically independent of the individual’s experience. The world as the individual experiences it, requires that the individual makes a contribution to it in order for the world to be as it is. Husserl’s failure to divest himself of the epistemological premise which has

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<sup>69</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: General Introduction a Pure Phenomenology*, Trans. F. Kersten 3 vols, (vol.1) (The Hague: Martinus-Nijhoff, 1983) 241, vol.1 of *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: General Introduction a Pure Phenomenology*, 1980-89.

<sup>70</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as rigorous science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, Trans. Q. Lauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) 168.

<sup>71</sup> David E. Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, 49.

underpinned much of the traditional philosophy, marks the point of departure for Heidegger from Husserl and also from Kant whose subjective method in philosophy, believes Heidegger, was limited by his notion of an individual's 'metaphysical nature.'<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Heidegger remains indebted to Husserl's phenomenological approach and the latter's rejection of the Cartesian *cogito* outlined in the Cartesian thought model.

Heidegger's phenomenology finds its most fundamental expression in the nature of Being and it is his prioritising of the primacy of *being-in-the-world* which marks the movement away from 'object/spectator' focus to an individual/perception focus. Perhaps taking his cue from Protagoras<sup>73</sup>, Heidegger advocates that phenomenon which presents itself and which is to be interpreted, has Being for its essence. Thus, the purpose of the phenomenological method for Heidegger is to 'hermeneutically phenomenologise.' By this, Heidegger means that the particular part of all existent objects which is to be interpreted is *Dasein*, human existence itself. In *Dasein*, Being is present to itself as Being and is aware of itself as Being. It has a 'presentness' which is not the case with other types of entities. Principally, *Dasein* is not abstracted from the world but rather, is always immersed in the everyday world. The second part of 'there' in Heidegger's expression for being an existent (*Dasein*) in the centre of a world amongst other things, refers to the world. Husserl had earlier spoken of a '*Lebenswelt*' to stress the solidness of the human encapsulation within reality. However, Heidegger's grounding of how totally immersed *Dasein* is in the world, realised a completely disparate position when investigating the ability of individual presences to make sense of inquiries into existence. The prioritisation of the world as a primordial phenomenon within Heideggerian thought is realised with the statement that the world 'is.'<sup>74</sup> The world, for Heidegger, is not phenomenologically perceived because its transcendental character 'lies

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<sup>72</sup> Mary Warnock, *Existentialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970) 47.

<sup>73</sup> Protagoras was the pre-Socratic philosopher who created friction against the other contemporary philosophical doctrines that claimed the universe was based on something objective and outside the human influence through his statement that man is the measure of all things.

<sup>74</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 73:102.

always already “in” it.’<sup>75</sup> The world does not exist alone as it were a thing, but each time *in* the corresponding object whose experience it makes possible.

The emphasis Heidegger places on the primacy of *being-in-the-world* and the average everydayness of *being-in*, provides the impetus for reading Clare within an existential ontological context. His consideration of the individual subject to be more important over any other philosophical inquiry, makes possible the emergence of a full dialogue between Heidegger’s account of his ontological analytic *Dasein* and Clare’s experiences in the *lifeworld*. Such a focus differs greatly from the philosophical endeavours that were being pursued during nineteenth century England. Eighteenth century English philosophy concerned itself mostly with substances, the nature of their existence, their Being or non-Being, together with matters that engaged the exoteric elements that encompassed the human subject and its cognitive faculties.

The chronological framework in which Clare was writing his poetry, saw developments within British philosophy pre and post Clare, that were attempts to provide fuller explanations of the natural world, and how its relationship to humanity and its related material substances were conceived. Philosophical investigations that expounded on political theories (*Leviathan*, 1651 by Thomas Hobbes), moral philosophy, (*Outlines of Moral Philosophy*, Dugald Stewart, 1801) and understanding the human mind (*Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, vols. 1 and 2, Dugald Stewart 1814) progressed further, the dianoetic insistences the Enlightenment had initiated. The principal thinkers of the eighteenth century, undoubtedly, were John Locke (1632-1704), George Berkeley (1685-1753) and David Hume (1711-76). All three philosophers embarked upon individually conceived projects which, undoubtedly, differed significantly one from another. Free thinking in mathematics and religious apologetics occupied an extensive segment of Berkeley’s thinking,

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<sup>75</sup> Heidegger’s term ‘*already in*’ is connected to his idea of ‘*Being-ahead-of-itself*’ (192-3:236). The world is always ‘beyond itself’ (192: 236) because ‘it is disclosed essentially *along with* the Being of *Dasein*; with the disclosedness of the world, the ‘world’ has in each case been discovered too.’ See *Being and Time*, 203:247.

philosophy of language, religion and morality engaged Locke, whilst Hume attended to aesthetics and classical economics as well as epistemology and metaphysics. Yet, a commonality exists between all three thinkers which both aids and directs any attempt towards unifying all three thinkers. Locke, Berkeley and Hume can be regarded in the broadest of senses as empiricists. Their work offers much evidence to show that their fundamental philosophical basis derived from this doctrine which subscribes to the theory that the acquisition of knowledge is advanced through experience. Locke's claim expressed in Book II of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* draws attention to the statement that our minds are like *tabula rasas*, and only become furnished by experience:

Our observation, employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.<sup>76</sup>

Berkeley's opening sentence of *The Principles of Human Knowledge* also demonstrates the idea that there are no mental contents that cannot be derived from sensation or reflection:

It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge, that they are either ideas imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions or operations of the mind, or lastly ideas formed by the help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) 104: II.22.

<sup>77</sup> George Berkeley, 'Of the Principles of Human Knowledge' *Berkeley's Complete Works*, vol.1 1705-21 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901: 257-347 (257)).



Like Berkeley and Locke, Hume in the first section of Book I of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, asserts his belief in the idea that the contents of the human mind are either ideas or impressions and that ideas produce the image of themselves in new ideas: but as the first ideas are supposed to be derived from impressions, it still remains true that all our simple ideas proceed either immediately from their correspondent impressions.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, it would seem that all three philosophers share a homogenetic methodological approach. This approach ultimately sought to establish a science of human nature that saw the contents of human understanding being based upon an introspective examination of the ideas that form the content of the understanding. A brief synopsis of all three follows.

Locke's notion of ideas provides the basic framework of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. His methodology was to analyse the scope and limitations of the individual's mental faculties almost entirely in terms of ideas. He believed that since no individual can think without being conscious of the ideas thought, the individual would, through their experience, be able to recognise what an idea is. Locke's methodology of ideas proves to be a problematic one. Ideas are subjective states of mind and they also inform and represent objective states of the external world. The issue that emerges in Locke's thinking is how to recognise or see those things the individual is supposed to be able to find within themselves. How much of what the individual is conscious of is to be understood as states of themselves, reflecting their own subjective nature, and what is left to be the objective world that is known?

The *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*<sup>79</sup> (1710) is George Berkeley's magnum opus. It is partly a critical response to what Berkeley regards as the 'faulty assumptions' Locke employs to reach his conclusions about the limited nature of the

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<sup>78</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton, Mary J. Norton, Oxford Philosophical Texts (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 1.1.1, 10.

<sup>79</sup> This work was re-written by Berkeley and published in 1713 under the new title of *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* in a more accessible dialogue to counteract its initial poor reception.

knowledge the individual can acquire. Whilst Berkeley shares Locke's view that the individual *is* limited in their knowledge of the natural world to what they can gain through their senses, he refutes Locke's claim that the natural world somehow exceeds the sensory knowledge of the individual. Berkeley does manage to veer from the realms of scepticism but converts everything that is connected to the cognitive faculties into ideas. For Berkeley, the natural world does not exhaust our sensory ideas. To be, is to be perceived, and the only things that exist are minds and ideas. Berkeley constructs a position which claims that not only do ideas exist in the mind, but these ideas do not represent or signify anything outside that which exists in the mind. What is incoherent for Berkeley is any account which attempts to ground human understanding of the nature of reality in material substances. Berkeley's view demonstrates that the world is not independent of the mind and that the cause of our ideas in regards to material substance is incoherent. Berkeley's thoughts determine that it is impossible to understand any inactive being having the ability to inaugurate or cause the process of thought. The ideas the individual has occurring in meaningful patterns or regularities, do not represent some mind-independent essence, but rather represent other ideas.

In Hume, we see the final logical consequence which an empirical theory of knowledge entails. The result is scepticism. According to Hume, the individual has no certain, self-evident knowledge of anything. Knowledge is confined to impressions and ideas. Henceforth, the individual is not in a position to assert the existence either of material objects or spiritual entities. The individual's notion of causality, that a particular effect is necessarily produced by a particular cause, is the result of an association of ideas, a habitual or customary observation of certain phenomena which appear to have such relations. The individual does not know of any uniformity, regularity or certainty in the working of nature. As a result, everything is doubtful and the individual becomes limited to perceptions and images. Thus,

pure phenomenology, epistemology and empiricism reduce the individual to an inert canvas receptive to only the ideological and the objective. For Heidegger, the opposite is true. ‘...*Dasein* is onto-ontologically prior’<sup>80</sup> in that it can itself be grasped “immediately”, but also in that the kind of Being which it possesses is presented just as “immediately.”<sup>81</sup>

Heidegger’s existential ontological account of *Dasein* and its duration in Being and time proves to be more meaningful to Clare. The poet’s self-reflecting engagement with existing in the world is both illuminated and energised by Heidegger’s focus on the individual and the world.

It is also Heidegger’s investigations into poetry from the perspective of ontology which makes germane, twentieth-century philosophy to Clare and his poetry. The pure essences of *things*, and the language of Being, help to manifest Clare the poet of Being.

#### IV

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The position of the chapters are structured in a way to demonstrate Clare’s contemplation of all types of Being which is evident in his poetry. The chapters’ discussion of Being is organised according to the types of Being Clare exhibits which, it could be said, amounts to an ‘existential-temporal analysis’<sup>82</sup> of Clare’s ontological understanding of the totality of Being and Being as a ‘factual experience.’<sup>83</sup> The initial placing of Clare within the context of poetry and ontology and *Being qua Being* as an art form, followed by the truth of Being in nature, to Being in an existentialist conception, to

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<sup>80</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 36:15.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 456: 405.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 151:116.

*Being-in* but out of Being, and ultimately non-Being, is loosely based on the trajectory of Clare's existence.

Chapter one establishes and provides reasons why Clare can be claimed as a poet of Being. This is achieved according to a Heideggerian poetic framework and a discussion of Hölderlin, Heidegger's poet of poets. In this chapter Clare is claimed as an essential poet: that is, for Heidegger, a poet who allows the presence of Being to be paramount in the poetic word. The poems which are analysed, highlight similarities in the way Hölderlin and Clare trace and make manifest Being's manoeuvrings within the poetic. Having discussed the presence of an ontological conscious within Clare's poetry, chapters two and three demonstrate Being as the *being-in* of the truth of Clare's poetry using *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827). The twelve poems are discussed in two sections of five and seven poems. The 'January' to 'May' poems help support the central intention which is to expose the ontological characteristics of Clare's poetry. The poems, not only exhibit works from a pure practitioner, but also show Clare's poetry's presentation of how truth happens within a text. The poetry's truth shields itself from means of interpretive methods to maintain Being as its main creative thrust. Having established Clare as a poet of Being, it becomes crucial to determine what type of poet of Being Clare is. This is the purpose of chapter three. Throughout its discussion, it tests the idea of Clare as a 'Heideggerian poet.' During the latter part of the discussion, the chapter entertains the idea of Clare as a poet who bears some conscious traces of Hölderlin. However, the chapter draws the conclusion that Clare is a poet of Being on his own terms, albeit one who can be discussed using Heidegger's poetic ontological framework and ontologically poetic terms. The poems 'June' to 'December' reveal that Clare is an independent poet of Being. Clare's poetry, at times, does not preserve the characteristics of Heidegger's ontological poetic characteristics. The poems allow the presence of external dynamics such as memory and knowledge to penetrate their ontological independence.

The trajectory of Clare's independent ontological consciousness continues as chapter four examines the relationship between Clare's nature poems, their textual truth and how they prompt the poet to consider nature's ontology, the ontology of the human, or, human Being. Clare's Wordsworth-like traits are noted and commented upon. The chapter explores how Clare observes not only nature's minutiae, but also the intrinsic value of nature. What is also probed is Clare's conviction that nature is able to offer the individual a form of pedagogy, something which the individual is not always mindful of or apprehends. The poems explored in this chapter, have their underlying depiction of a thinking poet highlighted to the point that the idea of Clare as a naïve Schillerian poet stands in need of a revision. Heidegger's merging of ontology and poetry prove fertile to this chapter's argument as it depicts Clare as a poet of deliberation who meditates and thinks.

Chapter five reveals another of the thesis' themes, Romanticism; a context in which Clare is continuously considered. Clare continues his propensity to think about Being but his thinking takes on a greater philosophical significance. Clare thinks through the attributes of life, its meaning and purpose. Clare is claimed as a philosophical poet precisely because of the latter and provides his reader with his existential thoughts which concern *being-in-the-world*. The existential dimension in Clare is superficial and lucid and the poems that are read reinforce completely, Clare as a philosophical poet. Heidegger's existential ontology supports the argument.

After the chapter has concluded that Clare believes that life is pointless, even cruel, chapter six explores Clare's awareness of himself (*Dasein*) in the world. His existential alienation and isolation within his immediate environment drive him to treat solitude as company. Using the ontology of the poetic as the home / space he could not find for himself in the world, Clare retreats further into the rhythms of poetry rather than the noise of the world. Chapter seven is a presentation of Clare as he pauses and subverts time. Clare is still

subjected to the conditions of existence even though he depicts himself to be an individual occupying firstly, a paused ontology and subsequently, un-Being. The argument of chapter seven also illustrates a neglected area within Heidegger's account of *Dasein*'s ontological existentials.<sup>84</sup>

The final chapter addresses and finds validation for Clare to merit being considered as a poet of Being, ontological thinker and philosophical poet as he is weighed up and compared to William Wordsworth. The philosophical components within Wordsworth are traced. Consequently, Wordsworth is set up as an exemplar of a philosophical poet and Clare is analysed against Wordsworth. Both poets appear to actualise the same achievements evidently through different poetic forms, epistemological channels and different poetic objectives. Yet, what is ascertained by both Wordsworth and Clare is a sophistication of reflective thinking which is open to the appropriation of theoretical ideas. Furthermore, Wordsworth and Clare illuminate how poetry is able to bring into clearer focus, the human situation.

The thesis shows that Clare's nature poetry and a large cross-section of his poems across his entire periods vibrate with an ontological agency. These poems, as they utilise the presence of 'truth' and the language of the 'real', undermine claims against Clare such as 'solely descriptive', (Keats)<sup>85</sup> 'unreflective' (Schiller)<sup>86</sup> or generally homogenous in his contextual intentions. During his expressions as a poet of the philosophic, and as a poet of Being bringing forth to *the Open* of the artistry of Being through acts of *ontopoiēsis*, Clare legitimises another discipline in which he and his poetry can be read.

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<sup>84</sup> See *Glossary*

<sup>85</sup> Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, 189.

<sup>86</sup> Schiller uses the phrase 'without thought or reflection' in his discussion of what constitutes Naïve poetry. Friedrich Schiller, *Essays*: Friedrich Schiller, ed. Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Walter Hinderer (New York: Continuum, 1993) 179-271 (xiii).

## Chapter One

### **The Artistry of Ontology: Clare Writing *Essential Poetry***

When discussing Being (τὸ ὄν) and poetry, for Heidegger, the fusion of the ontological and the poetic does not raise issues that pertain to literary criticism. His poetical premises, as Helen Vendler observes, are based on nostalgia for the presence of God in the universe. ‘He writes as one deprived of theological reassurance, seeing emptiness about him, and longing for presence.’<sup>1</sup> Thus, whether the poem maintains its visual form or detracts from it, whether metre or emotion brings difference or homogeneity to the textual ontology of the poem, do not concern Heidegger. Poetry is not art for Heidegger as it is for Aristotle. Heidegger’s poetic thinking does not embrace a strict aesthetic. Nor does it seek to embrace a comprehensive appreciative sense of poetic artistry. Poetry in the theoretical perceptions of Heidegger becomes that moment, that thing which ‘clears’ a space and provides the occasion for things/objects to enter into the *Open*<sup>2</sup> and belong to their *ownness*<sup>3</sup> ‘in all their radical singularity for the first time.’<sup>4</sup> For Heidegger, poetry is what accommodates the manifestation of Being since poetry encourages the enunciation of Being’s utterances.

Thinking and poetry have their nearness<sup>5</sup> to what Heidegger calls *mythos*. During his discourse on ‘What is Called Thinking?’<sup>6</sup>, as well as explaining what he means by

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Vendler, *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1988) 115.

<sup>2</sup> See *Glossary*.

<sup>3</sup> A Heideggerian synonym for the authentic or authenticity.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, *Heidegger’s Estrangements: Language, Truth, and Poetry in the Later Writings* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 50. Hereafter, *Estrangements*.

<sup>5</sup> Heideggerian nearness is a type of distance, and one that is predicated on appearance (and visibility) rather than abstract or moralised closeness. As Heidegger conceives a theory of *The thing*, it is nearness that makes the thingness of the thing appear. Nearness, however, does not presuppose revelation or any sort of mystical experience. Therefore, nearness can be interpreted as a measurement of the distance to or from *The thing* or, the essential nature of a subject or a work of art.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* Trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968). Originally published as *Was Heisst Denken?* (Verlag-Tuebingen: Max Niemeyer, 1954).

representational thinking (a calculated thinking that leads to a determined end), and reflective thinking (the type of thinking which ponders Being in itself and how it can be appropriated), Heidegger defines ‘mythos as the telling word.’<sup>7</sup> *Mythos* ‘is what has its essence in its telling—what is apparent in the unconcealedness of its appeal. The *mythos* is that appeal of foremost and radical concern to all human beings which makes man think of what appears, what is in being.’<sup>8</sup>

Heidegger’s claim is that poetry is what brings what is to be thought of into the unconcealed. The exigencies of the poetic and thinking processes are appropriated by Heidegger to establish an internal relationship. Within this relationship, Heidegger shows how *Dichten* (poetry) exposes *Denken* (thinking) to language. This radical synthesis, this poeticized thinking, is Heidegger’s recuperation of the liaison between language, presence and truth as *alētheia* (ἀλήθεια).

When Heidegger asserts that poetry leads us into a *Clearing*,<sup>9</sup> his assertion is more nuanced than his broad statement suggests. There is a particular poetry he has in mind when he states that poetry is ‘the founding of Being in words.’<sup>10</sup> This type of poetry that makes ‘there being’ or *Dasein* forget Being, is what Heidegger terms *essential* poetry. Poetry’s capacity to bring newness and strangeness to what is already present and ordinary comes from its own internalised non-speaking. Moreover, poetry’s renunciation of measurement and production play a fundamental role in its essentialism. ‘Poetry opens thinking to the withdrawal of language—holds open the possibility of a “thinking experience with

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<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> See *Glossary*.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Existence and Being* (London: Vision, 1949) 76.



language.””<sup>11</sup> It is what incites Being to manifest the ‘thing in things’ so that we are able to have a relationship with them.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is not to claim that Clare is a great metaphysical poet but that he is an *essential* poet. Clare’s descriptive poetry, and its essence of things coupled with the visual context of the poetry’s exhibition of thing-content, declare the poet’s ontological consciousness. This consciousness uses *that* language (*Dichtung* or the poetic word) which enacts reflective thinking and creates a *Clearing* for ‘that which is.’ The writing of *essential* poetry to be found in Clare’s descriptive poetry fulfils Heidegger’s function for language at the poetic level. It necessarily confronts *Dasein* with that ‘indefinable “something””<sup>13</sup> that is Being. Thus, the chapter demonstrates how Clare’s rigorous perceptions and declarative energy construct a linguistic analogue for Being.

Poetic language, according to Heidegger’s poetic thinking, deconstructs language as a system of single meanings; it founds Being in words. During his critical appreciation of Trakl’s poem ‘A Winter Evening’, Heidegger posits some remarks which seem rather deprecatory of language performing at the level of *everydayness*.<sup>14</sup> He remarks, ‘Poetry proper is never merely a higher mode (*melos*) of everyday language. It is rather the reverse: everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer.’<sup>15</sup> Heidegger is not antagonistic to what he refers to as instrumental language. It is the case that he recognises the lost energy for potential within this medium. Heidegger exalts poetry over instrumental language because poetic language is

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<sup>11</sup> Bruns, *Estrangements*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Tim Chilcott, ‘A Real World & Doubting Mind’: A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare (Hull: Hull UP, 1985) 130. Hereafter, ‘A Real World.’

<sup>14</sup> *Everydayness* means ‘a definite ‘how’ of existence that pervades *Dasein* ‘for life.’ That is, ‘the how in which *Dasein* ‘lives from day to day’, whether in all its conduct or only in certain conduct prescribed by *being-with-one-another*’ (*Being and Time*, 370). *Everydayness* contents itself with the habitual, even when this is burdensome in contrast to a ‘distinctive, definite way of existing.’ This term is explained in the *Glossary* but for a full explanation of this term however, please see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2008). Trans. of *Sein und Zeit*. 1927, 149:114.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘Language’ in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 187-210 (208).

forever showing its capability to perform a dual purpose and to invite more than one interpretation. It speaks of the recurrent events of the multiplicity of meanings, whilst simultaneously hosting consistent re-announcements of ‘the presence of what is present.’<sup>16</sup> ‘What happens when poetry operates like this is that otherwise unthought-of possibilities of apprehension are opened’<sup>17</sup> and Being is brought into presentness, ‘not in a representative mode but in a form that unconceals ‘thisness.’’<sup>18</sup>

Language at the poetic level for Heidegger is beyond [an] ‘internalised energy of reciprocal communication and suggestion’<sup>19</sup> performance or style, [It] ‘lets things go and comes into its own in an event of letting-go. It annihilates what is merely present before us or set over against us in the form of representations; it breaks the hold we have on things and allows them to come into their own as beings.’<sup>20</sup> This is poetry’s essentiality and is what Heidegger pronounces as *Gelassenheit* - ‘the language of *phūsis* and the *phūsis* of language.’<sup>21</sup> ‘*Phūsis*,’ according to Heidegger, ‘is what is of its own accord, what exists in itself. It is the releasement of language into its own.’<sup>22</sup>

To treat his theory to a more comprehensive exegesis, Heidegger leans on a small pantheon of German poets such as Stefan George, George Trakl and Rainer Rilke, who, at times, appears to ventriloquize Heidegger’s poetic thought. But there is a particular poet whose poetry leads Heidegger to regard him as the ‘poet of the poets.’<sup>23</sup> This poet is Hölderlin (1770-1843) and for Heidegger, Hölderlin’s poetic words are the essence of poetry.

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<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, ‘What is Called Thinking?’ Lecture XI Part II, 229-44 (242).

<sup>17</sup> Veronica O’Brien, ‘The Language of Poetry’, *An Irish Quarterly Review* 58 (1969): 415-426 (418) 5 Oct. 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000) 262.

<sup>19</sup> George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 83.

<sup>20</sup> Bruns, *Estrangements*, 49.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry’ in *Existence and Being* (London: Vision, 1949) 313. Also in Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, Trans. Keith Hoeller (Amhurst, New York: Humanity Books, 2000). The term is translated by Keith Hoeller as ‘the poet’s poet,’ 52.

Heidegger is aware that to designate Hölderlin as the poet raises the elemental but important question, ‘why not others?’ In justifying his choice, he writes: ‘I did not choose Hölderlin because his work, as one of many, realises the universal essence of poetry, but rather because Hölderlin’s poetry is sustained by his whole poetic mission: to make poems solely about the essence of poetry.’<sup>24</sup> What could Heidegger determine as the essence of poetry? What could poetic essence be? According to the philosopher’s ‘poetic criticism’, poetry is first ‘the founding of Being in the word’<sup>25</sup> and then functions as ‘the letting happen of the advent of truth of what is.’<sup>26</sup> In the presence of the unforgetting of Being, ‘the pure poetical composition that is essentially poetry, is the site whereby ‘World and things are brought to the fore (*zum Vorschein, hervorbringt*), and *Dasein* is brought into the unconcealedness of *the Clearing (lichtend-verbergend-frei-geben)*.’<sup>27</sup> Moreover, poetic essence says Heidegger comes to be that is without any other ‘is’ being being visible or audible.

Another correlative point that associates with Heidegger’s designation of Hölderlin as the essential poet, concerns the latter’s poetic bringing of the gods into language. This enables our expression of them by naming them and aids the inauguration of the world coming into the word. This helps to clarify Heidegger’s instinct and Jennifer Gossetti-Ferencei’s move to award Hölderlin another poetic accolade, that of ‘the philosopher’s poet.’<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, it is Heidegger’s other motive that stems from a dark context which lends a sense of validation to Hölderlin as the poet for philosophy. Heidegger attempts a thinking of Hölderlinian poetry that not only ‘essentializes’ Hölderlin, but also ‘nationalizes’

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, Trans. Keith Hoeller (Amhurst, New York: Humanity Books, 2000) 52. Hereafter, Heidegger, *Elucidations*.

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, *Elucidations*, 59.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, ‘The Origins of the Work of Art’ *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 15-88 (72). Hereafter, ‘OWA.’

<sup>27</sup> Leonard Orr, ‘Thinking and Poetry: Heidegger and Literary Criticism’, *Studia Neophilologica* 60 (1988): 207-214 (209).

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Gossetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy 38 (New York: Fordham UP, 2004), vi. Hereafter, Gossetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin*.

him as the ‘poet of the Germans’ and the ‘most German of all German poets.’<sup>29</sup> His decision to declare Hölderlin as the ultimate poet is quite clearly a historical one as Lacoue-Labarthe firmly believes:

Heidegger, not only assigned to poetry the task of a thinking that philosophy could no longer accomplish, he also attempted to weigh it down with a historical “mission” dictated, it must be said, by a political programme based on *a mytho-poetic annunciation of the historical destiny of Germany and the German people*.<sup>30</sup>

The presence of this historical-ontological critique throughout Heidegger’s readings of Hölderlin<sup>31</sup> is a persistent motif. It is consistently presented and revisited to present ‘a recuperation of the thinking he finds implicit in Hölderlin who, for Heidegger, belongs essentially to the law of movement of that thinking that is as essentially historical, yet to arrive to the *Bewegungsgesetz des Künftigen* (the dynamic of the law of the future) that Heidegger then aims to bring to thoughtful word.’<sup>32</sup> This thinking is reflective thinking and is what Heidegger describes as *Denken*, a re-thinking and response to an original call coming from the central living presencing of the being of the world...<sup>33</sup>

Yet, Hölderlin’s poetry can ‘speak’ outside of such political appropriations. Hölderlin’s poetic words can be the ‘letting be’ of poetry and an exemplar of reflective thinking all on its own. To exemplify the latter, a short discussion of the poem ‘Man’ follows.

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<sup>29</sup> Hölderlin’s Hymne ‘Andenken’, Gesamtausgabe (Hölderlin’s *Anthem Memory*, Complete Edition) 52:119.

<sup>30</sup> Phillip Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, Trans. Jeff Fort (Urbana: Illinois UP, 2007) ix. Originally published as *Heidegger, La Politique du Poème*, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> See Jennifer Gossetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin*, Phillip Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, Trans. Jeff Fort (Urbana: Illinois UP, 2007) and ‘Monstrous History: Heidegger Reading Hölderlin’, Andrzej Warminski, *Yale French Studies* No.77, *Reading the Archive: On Texts and Institutions* (1990) 193-209 to gain a fuller understanding of how Heidegger reads origin, the event of truth and destiny into Hölderlin.

<sup>32</sup> Gossetti Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, xviii.

Hölderlin's poem 'Man' (1798-1803)<sup>34</sup> does not work to reveal any coherent or identifiable significance. Nor is it anxious to interpret its own undertaking. Stanza one of 'Man' wants to have something of an Edenic feel:

When scarcely from the waters, O Earth, for you  
Young mountain peaks had sprouted and, breathing joy,  
The first delightful islands, full of  
Evergreen copses, gave out their fragrance  
(1-4)

Hölderlin's diction is composed of the substance of the spirit of an eternal 'is' as the amalgamation of earth and world become affiliated:

Then on the loveliest island where delicate  
And calm the air flowed ceaselessly round the copse,  
One morning, born in early halfflight  
After a temperate night, and bedded  
(9-12)

Beneath the clustered grapes, lay your loveliest child;—  
(13)

Hölderlin's words are words that show the act of showing forth, words that manifest bare and dissociated thinking -- or, as Heidegger calls it, *Denken*:

Uniquely blended, live both his father's soul  
And, Earth, your joy, your sadness, inveterate;  
He longs to be like her, like Nature,  
Mother of gods and all the embracing!  
(21-24)

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<sup>34</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, Trans. Michael Hamburger (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980). 75. Translated from Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, (Stuttgart, 1951). First published (London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1966).

David Constantine, a translator and critical thinker of Hölderlin, has suggested that Hölderlin's poetry is resistant to any reading whose method is to say the poem is working in this way or is echoing this particular poetic tradition. Commenting on its transcendental nature, he writes:

The gesture of exegesis in Hölderlin's poetry, the gesture of handing on to the reader an elucidated truth, needs to be read as something consciously illusory; as a metaphor within a whole metaphoric structure whose emotional premise is, precisely, the absence of the conditions of real exegesis, and the poems themselves contain many hints of the illusoriness of their own confident gestures.<sup>35</sup>

'The Course of Life' (1797-99)<sup>36</sup> is a second poem by Hölderlin which tests the strength of Constantine's conviction. Its dynamic is to uncommunicate becomings that have a past. Rendering itself as *essential*, 'The Course of Life' resists any particular moment in history; nothing is previous. Never ceasing to be only 'to be', it transcends *then-ness* and all other temporal measurements together with the conditions of existence with the quality of 'always.' Constantine's lead again proves fertile. 'Remembered knowledge... is a hindrance .... To read [this] poem well we need constantly to forget.'<sup>37</sup> 'The Course of Life' does not take for its subject the inevitability of the encounter with human condition; it only speaks of it:

Love draws earthward, and grief bends with greater power;  
Yet our arc not for nothing  
Brings us back to our starting place.  
(2-4)

Independent knowledge will lead to a 'level path' (12) and the poem urges man to 'learn to grasp his own freedom / To be gone where he's moved to go', (15-16). However, the poem in

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<sup>35</sup> David Constantine, 'Translation and Exegesis in Hölderlin', *MHRA*, 81.2 (1986): 388-97 (394) *Modern Humanities Research Association*, 21 Feb. 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, 149.

<sup>37</sup> Constantine, 'Translation and Exegesis in Hölderlin', 393.

its existentialist mode ‘gestures elsewhere’<sup>38</sup> and does not provide anything resembling a directive to fulfil its purpose. The conscious substratum of ‘The Course of Life’ collapses the poetic world into the world of absent gods. Hölderlin’s poetic language, as Heidegger contends, ‘...unite[s] the hints of the gods and the voice of the people’<sup>39</sup> and the poet stands as the intermediary between gods and humanity. Hence, language without calculation, and without category, will speak us into the existence and linguistic world of the gods.

The same stratospheric claims cannot be made for Clare. There appears to be no discernible commonality between ‘the poet’s poet’<sup>40</sup> whose poetry, says Heidegger, ‘stands between gods and men and who devoted his poetic word to this realm of Between’<sup>41</sup> and Clare. Yet, poetically, an aspect of homogeneity emerges since Hölderlin and Clare both write Being into existence, causing it to manifest in their poetic sayings. The Being that elucidates a theological direction for Hölderlin is what animates the joy of the ontic<sup>42</sup> for Clare.

Clare’s descriptive poetry possesses aesthetic properties, form, metre and rhythmical patterns. But, at the same time, the pure neutrality of the poems ‘breaks open an open place’<sup>43</sup> in which the poetry enacts a silence that disables any kind of interpretative violation. The

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<sup>38</sup> Damian Walford Davies, ed. *Romanticism, History, Historicism: Essays on an Orthodoxy* (London: Routledge, 2009) 3.

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger, *Elucidations*, 64.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>42</sup> The ontic is that kind of Being that Heidegger designates in *Being and Time* as having descriptive characteristics of a particular thing and the plain facts of its existence. As well as the idea of reckoning, objects in Being come under the idea of the ontic. The ontic is different to what manifests as ontological and this difference can be understood according to the level of ontological significance. Ontic Being is a kind of Being that can be studied without necessarily raising more general ontological questions. For example, equipment that can help ontological Being to be understood such as the representation of the thing rather than the truth that lies in the thing itself, namely Being. What characterizes the ontic and the ontological is not quantity or quality but significance which refers to the ‘kind of Being’ of things that fall into each category. The ontic has essentially a different type of significance than the significance of the ontological: it is a significance that is adequately grasped in reckoning. The ontological, however, only has a significance that can be grasped insofar as we grasp it in terms of significance. This is why it is more ‘primordial’ than the ontic because it is the significance of something explicitly taken as significance.

<sup>43</sup> Bruns, *Estrangements*, 49.

independence and self-preservation within Clare's profusion of description are exhibited in the poem 'Summer Tints' (1819-20).<sup>44</sup>

During the successive stresses of *it-ness*, rather than *that-ness*, it is as if Clare is writing his sequence of perceptions to build the poem's aesthetic but writing against another independent aesthetic consisting of timeless dimensions. The presencing of this presence, which both coordinates and subordinates the scenes and lines, transmit Clare's impressions of nature's bounties as naked moments of awakenings.

'Summer Tints' surrenders itself to what surrounds it. It is a poem that works through an economy of evocation. It evokes how it can become involved with larger truths whilst serving as a witness to what it is within its own realm. The poem's scenes are more than their representational content. They reveal their ontological method of disclosure; they are internally organised and they self-depict.

Clare's language seems to be aware of the mode of being of the objects and their self-sufficiency to project. Interestingly, the poem's language as it begins is not yet poetic. It becomes poetic when Clare becomes conscious that he is articulating rather than representing ontology's scenic impressions. The scenes are already ahead of Clare and his language. They move, and continually move onto and into their own ontological possibilities. Clare can only utter his appreciation of the natural scenes which go beyond acts of pictorial construction, whilst his diction gestures to the 'ever present possibilities to the truth of being.'<sup>45</sup>

The reflective thinking that is comprehensively expressed is an intrinsic element. But it does not stem from Clare, who is too preoccupied assimilating the 'ripening tinges o'er the checkerd plain' (3) and 'the face of nature softly swept' (11) with 'the lingering wind mixing the brown & green (12).' In its ability to achieve two actions simultaneously, the poem conveys Clare's context of being enchanted by how 'summers mellowing pencil' (2) is able

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<sup>44</sup> John Clare, *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, 2 vols (vol.2), eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 374.

<sup>45</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, xvii.



to sketch shades of itself. At the same time, the poem also exposes its poetic ontology. This narrative does not speak, only points to what it can internalise and what should lie outside the poem. The poem reveals that it has negotiated a path for itself through its imagery. Such a statement appears to be shutting Clare out of his poem, but this is not the case. The diction that is charged with evoking the moments of Clare's sentient experience of nature's bounties is not overshadowed by any other poetic presence. Clare's words state their own creative power. The plenitude of nouns flaunts the ontic Being of what is kinaesthetic and achieves the transformation of an unremarkable event in Helpston into something that is almost from a heterocosm.<sup>46</sup> 'It is a world of fluent harmony, the expression of a primitive experience'<sup>47</sup> to the point that the existence of the outer world, appears to be relegated to the capabilities of an imaginative experience. Even the 'shepherds from their bowers have crept / & stood delighted musing o'er the scene' (13-14) which appears to be without reference to externality and time.

The poetry of Clare's diction proves to be more than a carrier of the poet's experience of the natural phenomena. It is immanent within its animating impulse. The subordinate clause 'Bosom deep in grain' (1) arrests our eyes and keeps us there loading and re-loading

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<sup>46</sup> In his article, 'Postmodernist Lyric and the Ontology of the Poem', *Poetics Today* vol. 8.1 (1987): 19-44, Brian McHale uses the word 'heterocosm' and speaks of a heterocosm theory (19). He employs this term to mean a separate world. When he asks one of his fundamental questions regarding the priority of systemisation or epistemology within the world of the poem, McHale discusses 'the ontological rift across the poetic heterocosm' (24) and the 'heterocosmic difference'. His meaning here, is one that regards 'the separate world of the poem from the real world of experience [and] its discontinuity from the real world...', (25). Such statements from McHale are a part of his specific focus on 'The ontologization of structure' (24). In his review of *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Harvard: Harvard UP, 2006) by Gordon Teskey, William Poole in his Review 'Out of his Furrow' *London Review of Books* 29.3 (2007): 16-17 also uses the term heterocosm. He writes, 'For Gordon Teskey, the exemplary poet of hallucination is Spenser, whose Fairyland is a stable heterocosm which a reader can enter for sustained periods without undergoing any oscillatory experience' (16). Another example of the word heterocosm being used to mean a separate or fictitious world is to be found in James C. Nohrnberg's Review of "'Paul Alpers The Poetry of The Faerie Queene,'" *Spenser Review* 43.2 (2013): 1-22. Clarifying the presence of conjectural worlds in Spenser's iconic poem Nohrnberg writes, 'The fictitious "world" or heterocosm of Spenser's poem exhibits only a dubious analogy to the real one, because its milieu is so provisional, speculative, and, for want of a better description, psychologically produced by emotion and ideation upon its interior scenes and within its private scenarios' (5). Although this word is not a part of common linguistic usage, when this term is referred to in this thesis, like McHale, it will be in the context of a separate or alternative world.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1973) 103.

this visual focus. The palpable rustling of the wheat grains through the vibrations of the trochaic metre is dexterous in inferring sound where no sound is mentioned. The imagery in the line ‘& bearded corn like armies on parade’ (5) that Clare perhaps intended to be representational of erect corn, also details another aesthetic. This simile demonstrates how Clare’s descriptive style imitates the feelings which the object or scene itself emanates. This is not pathetic fallacy, it is the poem pronouncing that thing of which it consists.

Clare’s diction accomplishes a *pure* poetry because it does not produce or re-produce. ‘Summer Tints’ has no trajectory. It moves along displacing its own inclination to overlap with another presence or another sentiment. Clare also ‘neglects to seek a justification for his disclosure of natural processes—his impulsion is to [say] not imagine and compare.’<sup>48</sup> Whilst Clare gazes and adores, the language that *says* his pure description makes viable the idea of Clare as a ‘pure practitioner.’<sup>49</sup>

Clare’s poetry allows ‘the details of expression...to be referred solely to the immediate context in which they occur.’<sup>50</sup> It functions according to the artistic process Heidegger explains in ‘The Origins of the Work of Art’ when the character of the thing erupts within the Being of the ontic.<sup>51</sup> In ‘Summer Tints’, this is exemplified in the poetry’s richness and vibrancy, bound up as they are with occurrence rather than relationship:

Light tawny oat lands wi their yellow blades  
 & bearded corn            like armies on parade  
 Beans lightly scorched that still preservd their green  
 & nodding lands of wheat in bleachy brown

(4-7)

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<sup>48</sup> Ben Hickman, ‘John Clare and the End of Description’, *JCSJ* 30 (2011): 5-21 (6).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> James C. Nohrnberg, Review, “‘Paul Alpers, The Poetry of The Faerie Queene,’” *Spenser Review* 43.2 (2013): 1-22 (11).

<sup>51</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘OWA,’ 27.

Clare's use of the adjective 'mellowing' in the sentence 'When summers mellowing pencil sweeps his shades' (2) is an example of how language pauses during the act of signifying and focuses upon itself. During this pause, the personality of the poem, it could be said, is decided. The tone and semantic inference of the word 'mellowing' not only heightens the reader's sensory perceptions but the personification numbs consciousness of anything outside the language's connotative force.

Clare's experience of enjoying what the scene affords overtakes the syntactical organisation and disrupts the iambic pentameter together with the intended structure of writing in decasyllables. This can be seen in the second, eighth and twelfth lines which overrun to eleven syllables. It is interesting to note that these sentences contain the moments when Clare's joy at the wonderment of nature becomes an 'excess.'<sup>52</sup> Summer's tint casts its balmy hues on the land with its mellowing pencil (2), the maids and clowns in their daily activities form a streaking pattern on the banks (8) in the midst of the scene and the lingering wind metaphorically mixes with the brown and green (12). In these sublime moments, the sonnet, loses the importance of the need to conform to convention as 'ontology is foregrounded, epistemology backgrounded'<sup>53</sup> and thus takes over control of the sonnet's syntax.

'Summer Tints' is a poem that expresses a dual ontology. The textual world of the poem paraphrases Being whilst the diction, metre and images add to the pulse of their sophisticated simplicity. Thus, the existence of Being in this mutual hegemony finds two places in which to 'be' as it enlivens what it comes into contact with.

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<sup>52</sup> Chilcott, 'A Real World', 93.

<sup>53</sup> Brian McHale, 'Postmodernist Lyric and the Ontology of Poetry', *Poetics Today*, 8.1 (1987): 19-44 (26).

The overflowing disclosure of the pure thing in Clare's natural descriptions, can be likened to Husserl's method when carrying out his *Logical Investigations*.<sup>54</sup> For Husserl, the rejection of all presuppositions was the only way to assure that perception could take place without the distortion of previous conceptions of reality.<sup>55</sup> To reject all universal ideas, all transcendent systems of thought, and all beliefs in absolute or eternal values was the way Husserl could conceive of his pure phenomenology.<sup>56</sup> Outside of Clare's belief in external values in what he refers to as God or his maker<sup>57</sup> he appears to write according to Husserl's ethos of not being mindful of what lies external to his method of transposing nature's beauty into his poetic forms.

Two sonnets, 'A Scene'<sup>58</sup> and 'A Spring Morning' (1820's-1830's)<sup>59</sup> help to demonstrate the concept of 'only this' in Clare's phenomenal world. The poems show *how* they are in the midst of what is, as they are conveyed from an ontological perspective. Their unwillingness to regard anything else that is not of themselves maintains their poetic integrity through the medium of their 'self-cancelling assertiveness.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols, Trans. J. N. Findlay, ed. Dermott Moran (London: Routledge, 2001). First published in German as *Logische Untersuchungen* by M. Niemeyer, Halle 1900 and 1901, Second German edition, vol.1 and vol. 2, Part 1 first published in 1913.

<sup>55</sup> Husserl, 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science' ('Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft'), Trans. and ed. Quentin Lauer, 1965. First Published in 1910. Quoted from *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 340.

<sup>56</sup> Phenomenology is a study of the structures of consciousness experienced from the first person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions. Definition provided by the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2003), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>> 23/09/2014.

<sup>57</sup> Clare, *The Later Poems of John Clare*, (2 vols.) vol.1 eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 397-98 (98). Hereafter, Clare, *The Later Poems*.

<sup>58</sup> Clare, *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, vol.1, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 413. This poem simply dated as 'Old' but the year 1810 is given by Tim Chilcott, 'A Real World & Doubting Mind': A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare (Hull: Hull UP, 1985) 28.

<sup>59</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.2, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 297.

<sup>60</sup> A paraphrase of Adam Kirsch, 'The Taste of Silence' *Poetry Foundation*, (2008) <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/180561> 17/02/09 1-4.

At once, Clare is struck by the geo-physical beauty of the view in 'A Scene' which seems to be a textual manifestation of one of John Constable's landscapes:

The landscapes stretching view that opens wide  
With dribbling brooks & rivers wider floods  
& hills & vales & darksome lowering woods  
With grains of varied hues & grasses pied

(1-4)

The poem then presents itself as an address to those moments when nature's awesome beauty falls out of the range of expression. Clare admits he is struggling to find words that would articulate such an event. However, the iambic stresses help to translate the liveliness of this occasion when the signals of communication within language is paused:

All these with hundreds more far off & near  
Approach my sight—& please to such excess  
That Language fails the pleasure to express

(12-14)

What is activating Clare's apparent ineffability is the nature of Being and the Being of nature. In a shorter poem entitled 'All Nature has a Feeling' (1845)<sup>61</sup> Clare marks this instance whereby it is impossible to know a language able to translate nature's thingly character:

All nature has a feeling: woods, fields, brooks  
Are life eternal: and in silence they  
Speak happiness beyond the reach of books;  
There's nothing mortal in them; their decay  
Is the green life of change; to pass away  
And come again in blooms revived.  
Its birth was heaven, eternal is its stay,  
And with the sun and moon shall still abide  
Beneath their day and night and heaven wide.

Nature's feelings are hermetic -- so cannot be known, until language can express the essences of things which, according to the poem, lie in the woods, fields and brooks. These objects

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<sup>61</sup> Clare, *The Later Poems*, vol.1, 210.

‘speak nature’s happiness, but because their speech is silent, it is ‘beyond the reach of books.’

(3) J. Hillis Miller, writing on the difficulty of critiquing Wallace Stevens’ later poetry, comments on such an impasse. ‘There is one more aspect of Stevens’ thought, however, and this is the most difficult to see or say’<sup>62</sup> writes Miller. The aspect Miller finds difficult to express is Stevens’ sense of Being.

This observation on Stevens by Miller is applicable to Clare. Looking out onto ‘The landscapes stretching view that opens wide’ (1) in the poem ‘A Scene’, Clare, like Miller, struggles to comment. Clare is left only to assimilate and enjoy what these moments afford. Yet, as Miller explains, ‘This apparent defeat is the supreme victory.’<sup>63</sup> The meaning behind Miller’s ironic phrase is that when all that is external falls silent, Being shows its presentness and reveals a glimpse of itself in the essence of things. Even the poem’s diction is about itself, using what Terry Eagleton describes as ‘a phenomenology of language.’<sup>64</sup>

The diction helps to bring closer to the surface the idea within the poem of the truth of experience. Clare’s thinking, which is both reflected and reflexive, moves through a diction that becomes more autonomous as it amalgamates, like a collective noun, the multiplicity of impressions into one ‘single presentness.’<sup>65</sup> What can also be gleaned is ‘Clare tends to perceive within a spatial rather than temporal framework.’<sup>66</sup> As he attends to Clare’s perspective and how objects, activities and scenes approach Clare’s sight, Tim Chilcott<sup>67</sup> uses this sonnet to comment on the false impression of layers of simultaneous awareness that Clare’s seeing suggests. Chilcott observes:

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<sup>62</sup> J. Hillis Miller, ‘Wallace Stevens’, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth Century Writers* (Cambridge: Belknap Press-Harvard UP, 1966) 217-84 (277). Hereafter, ‘Wallace Stevens.’

<sup>63</sup> Hillis Miller, ‘Wallace Stevens’, 279.

<sup>64</sup> Terry Eagleton, *How to Read A Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 21.

<sup>65</sup> Chilcott, ‘A Real World’, 16.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 28-29.

Each of the first two lines depicts a carefully controlled expansion of vision. The process of a gradual widening of perspective, suggested by the participle 'stretching', achieves a fullness of range with the main verb 'opens wide'; and the progression is repeated in the second line with, again, a participial form, 'dribbling brooks', which evolves into a broader visual perspective in the 'rivers wider floods.' This attempt at perspectival design, however, the impression given of controlled spatial connections between Clare's eye and what he sees, is severely eroded in the third line, where the hills, vales and woods are not related to each other in even a general geographical sense, in spite of the repeated conjunction.<sup>68</sup>

Chilcott's focus on Clare's ways of looking is an enlightening study of the factual and fictional way Clare gains the objects in his view. But what is overlooked is the significance of Clare's sense of Being, how that sense creates acts of permutations between the now and the now again, and provides a sense of continuity in Clare's looking. In its ontic presence, 'what is' impresses upon the poetry a feeling of immediacy and regulates how the objects within the scene come to Clare and then return to themselves. Thus, what approaches Clare's sigh, approaches through the movement of the poem's consciousness as well as Clare's temporal experience of each scene. As each scene interrupts Clare's perspectival gaze, it becomes clear, as Chilcott points out, that Clare's seeing does not follow a linear movement. It is a gradual process whereby his vision expands.<sup>69</sup>

In a way that recalls the inaccessible happiness that Clare documents in 'All Nature has a Feeling', the other sub-textual subject within 'A Scene' functions as silent and invisible. But this invisibility leaves a trace which supports the idea that the presence of this poetic subject is a something rather than a nothing. J. Hillis Miller writes pertinently of 'a letting-be of things but also [...] a letting-go of representational consciousness.'<sup>70</sup> He explains:

...the nothing is not nothing. It is. It is Being. Being is a pervasive power, visible nowhere in itself and yet present and visible in all things. It is what

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>70</sup> Gosetti Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin*, 6.

things are through the fact that they are. Being is not a thing like other things and therefore can only appear to man as nothing, but it is what all things must participate in if they are to exist at all.<sup>71</sup>

Clare's repeated use of the word 'and' (or, specifically, the ampersand) demonstrates the pace of an overlapping as the events threaten to overwhelm his looking. Each scene seems to be continually in the moment of passing from the present tense to the present continuous. Hence, before they move beyond him, Clare provides a glimpse of Being's sensuous pressure by recording the scenes using dependent clauses to capture the activity of sound:

-& thoughtful shepherd bending oer his hook  
& maidens stript haymaking too appear  
& hodge a wistling at his fallow plough  
& herdsmen hallowing to intruding cow

(8-11)

The run of verbal activity leaves the syntax breathless and erratic as Clare impresses upon the reader, the feeling that he is saying rather than writing the detailing of Being's movement across the scenes.

In similar vein to Hölderlin, Clare uses poetry as a medium which highlights the relationship between humans, existence and what exists in existence. A large section of his descriptive poetry more than gestures towards a dialogue with Being. Within Clare's poems, there is no ground that could be recognised as having been posited or configured. 'A Scene' is suggestive of a poem with an inward agency that is solely responsive to the observer's phenomenal experience. What Clare's writing documents is the poem's *what-ness*. Questions of how poems like Clare's sonnet come into existence, how their art is possible, dissipate on a terrain of silence. Their existence is outside of Reason; their self-determination is their

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<sup>71</sup> J Hillis Miller, 'Wallace Stevens', 279.



conscious preoccupation. Nothing overtakes them; nothing abounds in them other than their self-showing of truth. Hence, 'A Scene' shows itself as 'a form of being not of mapping.'<sup>72</sup>

It is in this way that Clare is an *essential* poet. The essence of his descriptive poetry is to mirror Being *qua* Being. Clare's poetry is open to Being; to be open to Being, for Heidegger, is the truth of a 'poet's vocation.'<sup>73</sup>

Attending to the exuberance of the ontic, 'A Spring Morning' (1820s-1830s)<sup>74</sup> is truly receptive to Being's presence. The poem vaunts its status of *as-is*, allowing it to dispense with the need for explanation:

As green as meadows—little birds revive  
As from a trance with chittring noise & song  
Each ground wi bleating sheep is all alive  
& clowns wi pleasure guide their guide their ploughs along

(6-9)

The uninterrupted continuity of natural and rural activity is almost metaphysical, as if what takes place in this scene is occurring for the first time. The poem moves through its fourteen lines without a subject. Instead, Clare confers a romantic style upon the events of *everydayness* and trades his usual style of observation for one that closely resembles an approach that is pensive. The visual imagery and sounds in such details as the clowns guiding their ploughs (9), the ravens returning to the fen (10) and the 'chittring noise & song' (7) of the little birds open up a path in the poem beyond correspondences with signals of truth. The fluid environment of the poem's own world, against the opening up of other artistic worlds, leads to, and arrives at, the core reality of the poem outside the process of art. The acoustic words and simplicity of the syntax support the continuous rhythmic units of alternating

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<sup>72</sup> Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 262.

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, 'What Are Poets For?', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 94.

<sup>74</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol. 2, 297.

rhymes. Clare's sense of the purity of the moment continues to exhibit the *what-ness* of objects in this poem, robust with the art of ontology. The images Clare sees will always be faithful to the sensory surfaces of 'what' and will have little connection with any idea of 'how.' What is also discernible in this poem is the expression of a serene spontaneity. It is not only to be found in the poem's detailing of the sun pursuing its travels 'oer a blue expanse of skye' (2), 'field heaths & commons stretch[ing]' (5) and wildlife being wildlife without hindrance. It is also a part of the diction's style which verbalises everyday reality. Clare's words expose how the images and objects reveal their actuality which is far removed from the idea of images having been constructed from memory, knowledge or previous experience. To the fore is the concreteness of the ontic. The poem occupies the space where the mind perceives that place where Being and poetry become reflected. Everything else besides the poem becomes nothing, giving 'A Spring Morning' space to *say* its poetic status which has been composed by the creative senses of Being's aesthetic self. Being speaks. And what can be heard? Word and Being speaking. During this time, the composition of the poem comes forth as sense experience but also enunciates the expression of what is composing the images.

What appears to be an exemplar of Clare's 'faithful description of rural reality is revealed as a more complex engagement'<sup>75</sup> with an ontological consciousness as opposed to conceptual ideologies. But what is an apparent exception is the poem's use of poetic models such as the sonnet form. The phenomenal richness of Clare's scene creates the sense of an origin of presence. Such a sense ensures that in no way does the sonnet form and its associated traditions interfere with or detract from the poem's projection of a text that communicates through endless exchanges and correspondences with truth's own way of occurring. The truth of the poem's ontological reality is its poetic artistry. It sets up a sense of artifice in its use of form. However, 'The work can work displacement because, in its created

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<sup>75</sup> Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008) 76.

form, it withdraws from explanatory schemata into the enigma of its sheer '*that-ness*' and '*such-ness*.'<sup>76</sup>

The poem allows Being to be; it is not an interpretative performance. The 'Ravens [that] resume their journeys to the fen' (10) and the 'chickens that hasten to the clucking hen' (12) do so outside of a fiction and a conflation of a historico-theoretical psychology. The natural presence of the modality of Being, visibly touches the diction of the poem, enhancing the sensuous pressure of the aesthetic.

The display of Clare's artistic technique aids the manifestation of the nature of reality. His poetic technique realises the idea that the natural world is not an idol to be worshipped but is full of moments that are waiting to become a part of the observer's psyche consciously and unconsciously. On numerous occasions, Clare makes the move to ground the idea that the universe is a living organism and manages, with or without intended purpose, to highlight the relationship between the individual and nature. Clare's poetic language, which emphasises nature's 'natural fabric', calls attention to how humanity is able to respond to and express nature. Clare's experience of himself in a particular place is not an attempt by him to formalise humanity's response to nature. This poem illustrates how Clare is less interested in how humanity uses nature to express its self-understanding. Rather, Clare's poetic language extracts experience from a place but leaves the natural place intact. Whether the scenes are meaningful or not is not Clare's concern. The diction which produces the imagery of 'A Spring Morning' encourages the reader to suspend time and the critical poetic process in the reader. Instead, Clare with his practice to invest in sense experience, Clare encourages the reader to become immersed in the richness of his sustained vision of rapture as he maintains the placidity of the scene and the general mood of sublimity. His romanticism of nature also reveals more than an expert handling of personification; it is as if what is presented has souls:

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<sup>76</sup> Véronique M. Fóti, *Heidegger and the Poets*, 57.

The sun looks oer the willows & pursues  
His travels oer a blue expanse of skye  
Oft met by playing clouds in light limbd hues  
Like visions of the fancy passing bye

(1-4)

‘A Spring Morning’ reaffirms the fundamental presence of the idea of ‘letting be.’ What is external to the poem has not been attended to. What has been exhibited is the poem’s ‘being-there’, a term Heidegger uses interchangeably with the term *Dasein* which carries the meaning of existing as an animated entity in Being and Time.

Clare’s descriptive style has attracted a number of critical responses<sup>77</sup> that attempt to account for its many disparate functions. These criticisms have also attempted to lift his style of observing and writing out of a perceived simplicity, or to speak, like Schiller, out of naiveté and allocate it a transforming role. Two such critics are Thomas Frosch and Hölderlin’s translator and critic, David Constantine writing on Clare.

Frosch<sup>78</sup> interprets Clare’s moments of pure descriptions thus:

... Clare is enacting the confrontation with such changes even when he seems to be giving us description for its own sake; that in his moments of apparently “pure” description his stylistic manners, his ways of describing, are the gestures of a dramatic situation; and that the large imaginative drama that unifies his career, the attempt to come to terms with the problematical experience of change, can be read in the modifications in his way of portraying natural objects.<sup>79</sup>

Frosch’s perspective stems from his belief that ‘for Clare the landscape is never twice the same’,<sup>80</sup> whereas for Constantine, Clare’s descriptive poetry merits the adjective ‘heroic.’<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See Siobhan Craft Brownson, “Waterflies with tiny wings”: Marking Nature in John Clare’s Poems’, *JCSJ* 25 (2006): 51-64.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas R. Frosch, ‘The Descriptive Style of John Clare’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 10.2 (1971): 137-49.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

Constantine's interpretation is associated with those moments of joy Clare experiences in nature because they are moments of triumph against the un-idyllic biographic circumstances he finds himself in. This prompts him to discuss Clare's descriptive style as 'an infinite complexity.'<sup>82</sup> Following on from the work of Frosch and Constantine, the chapter offers its own appraisal of Clare's descriptive poetry. Clare's poetry is directed towards a more essential poetic revealing. His poetic language highlights the 'linguistic being'<sup>83</sup> of words and ideas in their original intentions. Words such as 'earth' and 'nature' are used in a 'naturalised language' outside of performing ideologies. Moreover, Clare's diction grants his 'disclosing vocabulary'<sup>84</sup> an authoritative indeterminacy of *as-if* or *as-when*. 'The sonnet 'The Setting Sun (1807-15)'<sup>85</sup> is a poem that further demonstrates how Clare's poetry occupies the paradox of being an ontologically pure multiplicity.

Initially, 'The Setting Sun' reveals a narrow spectrum of what is detailed in the title and reflected in the content. The poem's conviction is to give attention to the beauty, function and directional course of the sun. Clare knows that he must enjoy its brightness, and dazzling rays in his view because it will set '...yon far hills behind' (3) and subsequently visit other worlds (4) along its own trajectory. The 'spangling glories [that] all around him shine' (5) will soon disappear and leave bereft of glory, Clare's scene. The lines 'This scene how beauteous to the musing mind / That now swift slides from my enchanting view' (1-2), bear a sense of transience as it makes its own way through the poem's sentiments. Clare's consistent use of sibilance helps with establishing the poem's rhythm. This, however, cannot be read as a reference to any ontological discrepancy within the poem; rather, it is 'the natural

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Phillip Wolf, 'Heaney and Heidegger: Poetry, Ontology and Ideology', *Real: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature, Literature and Philosophy*, vol.13, ed. Herbert Grabes (Berlin: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1997) 313-332 (326).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>85</sup> Clare, *Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, vol.2, 588.

indolence'<sup>86</sup> of the poem's psyche attending to the 'tension between feeling'<sup>87</sup> and Clare's 'artful artlessness.'<sup>88</sup> The origin of the words 'swift slides' (2) found in the declarative's second sentence is unclear. Are they from Clare's phenomenal language describing exactly what he sees, or do they come from Clare's intention to use the words as a verb? Whatever their intention, the words are the only measure in the poem that is indicative of the temporal. Yet, they seem to betray the slow pace of the sentences the sonnet moves through as they paint a scene that is essentially still.

Clare's use of the sun certainly lends an aesthetic element to the poem as 'the nameless colours cloudless & serene' (6) indicate. But the creative use of the sun is also a resource to showcase the creativity of ontology within the poetic. The sun arrives over the landscape and pours its rays upon the scene, but it does so according to the dictation of Being and its intuition. It is the sun that activates the scene, initiates 'the beginning of things', as a cause of things. As Jacques Maritain illustrates, all things in the sensible world do not merely exist as things in fact, they exist as things *in act*.<sup>89</sup> Since it is Being that determines existence, as it continues to disseminate and enliven the phenomenon, the scene gains its own determination. It is a determination to 'be there' without having any reference to what does not appear within it.

Independent determination is also present with this sonnet that is an aesthetic object in its own right. 'The Setting Sun' contradicts the traditional literary norms of the sonnet form. It occupies a terrain that is absent from a context of history and culture from which the sonnet stems. The poem sets forth itself from its teleology, passing it without taking notice. Instead, it highlights through its phonetic qualities (namely assonance), 'the being hidden

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<sup>86</sup> Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*, 131.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Phrase taken from chapter one which is entitled 'Artfully Artless' in Mina Gorji's *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008) 15-31.

<sup>89</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism: With Other Essays*, Trans. J. F. Scanlan (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930) 24.

behind or below the phenomenal world.’<sup>90</sup> The diction ignores the idea of construction in all its semantic connotations. The words have an ‘individual consciousness, a reality and intentionality of their own.’<sup>91</sup> Words and sentiments such as ‘What nameless colours cloudless and serene’ (6) are not superimposed on any pragmatic faculty. From Clare, they approach the reader experience in an autolectic sense as ‘natural things.’ Clare’s poem illustrates how it privileges a reference to phenomenal language and language itself in acts which are founded on a pure multiplicity.

John Crowe Ransom’s attempt to dichotomise poetry into three broad groups identifies one group’s focus on materials or things, whilst the other concerns itself with ideas. The third group is an amalgamation of the two other groups together with a fusion of intellect and feeling. Ransom labels these poetic categories Physical poetry, Platonic poetry and Metaphysical poetry respectively. At the same time Clare writes and names Being as an *essential* poet, his ontological artistry is also to be found in the way he can participate in two simultaneous concepts without showing his belonging to either one exclusively or predominantly.

After the octave in ‘The Setting Sun’, the sonnet showcases the volta in an event where Ransom’s ideas of Metaphysical poetry play out as the Physical and Platonic meet. The octet attends to geo-physical aspects and how the sun impinges its beauty on their already delightful presence on the landscape. As soon as the sestet begins, however, Clare allocates another function to the sun and uses it as an analogous object to address his theological concerns:

So sets the Christians sun in glories clear  
So shines his soul at his departure here

(9-10)

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<sup>90</sup> Wolf, ‘Heaney and Heidegger’, 330.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 314.

As Clare collapses the poem into ideas regarding the Christian life and its potential to gain heaven, the sun plays out the familiar existential images of sunrise and sunset as occurrences of birth and death. As the sun ‘exit[s] from this lovely scene’ (8), the act of participating in two ontological statutes of poetry at the same time, does not affect the poem’s fundamental poetic status of being pure. The poem maintains its purity despite the continuous intermingling of two poetic states, even when one cannot be determined from the other. Its purity is maintained on the basis of what Jacques Derrida outlines in the process of *invagination*. The latter is an occurrence whereby, genres bleed into one another due to a lack of policing at their borders. However, the work maintains its purity as a result of all states being null and void.<sup>92</sup> Clare’s poem resists all interferences because of its stillness or in other words, its independent totality. Whilst the poem surrenders itself to stillness, it does not haemorrhage knowledge nor does it boast about experience. ‘A Setting Sun’ remains still on account of the absence of factors intent on determining truth because it lies in its own truth having framed itself with it. The poem also remains pure because it retains its self-referentiality. This is located in how it *says* the poēsis of its own existence. At the same time, however, the poem is seen to enter into what lies external to it since it accommodates Clare’s ideas about soteriology; but this is Clare making known his Christian beliefs and this is not a part of its ontological profile. There is an attendance to things and ideas, and there is transitivity between the one and the other. Yet, although there is ‘a being of relation’<sup>93</sup> in the imagery of the setting sun and the short homiletic content of Clare’s sestet, Being *qua* Being ‘is subtracted from all relation.’<sup>94</sup> Being is only consistent with itself and its essences that animate the ontic within the scene. The multiplicity of ontologies in ‘A Setting Sun’ brings awareness to an overlapping of poetic states. In the midst of the ‘in between’ is the poem

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<sup>92</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘The Law of Genre’, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992) 221-54.

<sup>93</sup> Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2003) 296.

<sup>94</sup> Hallward, *Badiou*, 296.



occupying its own ontological space, realising the poem's paradoxical status of a pure multiplicity.

Thus, Clare's descriptive poetry can be read as poetry that does not provide co-ordinates to 'a sense of place' but exists within an indeterminate ontological status. The sonnet 'Autumn Landscape' (1821-22)<sup>95</sup> shows the process in action.

'Autumn Landscape' is immediate in stating where the poem is located. It is set in the woods (1) but this is only a physical place within Clare's beloved pathways and not a part of the poem's ontological position from where it evokes identifying characteristics of Ransom's Physical poetry. The existence of phenomena and their visual impressions are reflective of a situation, rather than of the cohesion that comes from argument or exposition. The poem's way 'to be' is relayed through its ontology of difference existing between appearances and phenomenon. This difference presents a multiplicity which is not antagonistic to the poem's being-there as a pure multiplicity. 'Autumn Landscape' is a sonnet in which the language does not utter what lies internally within the poem. Instead, it projects what it is internalising. The plethora of images-events within this scene reads as one extended sentence. Art and artlessness again combine. The description consistently spills over into the next sentence which seems only to be a co-incidence of enjambment rather than enjambment which is technical and purposeful:

The woods tanned greenness beautifully turns  
To russets reds & yellows were the eye  
Revels in wild delight & loathly turns  
To were the fields & meadows lonely lye

(1-4)

The presenting of false harmony, mimicked by the varying rhyme-scheme, is only an image behind which the presence of Being solidifies the idea of the poem as a 'true subject'<sup>96</sup> since

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<sup>95</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.2, 588.

it is poised on the edge of Being's unanswerable questions. 'The larks together [that] flock and lowly flye' (6) are only a part of the scene for as long as their flying is within Clare's view and the crane with its lonely repetitive cry (13) seems pushed into the background. These images are presented by Clare as just another set of descriptive images. Yet, they bring attention to the ontological difference between appearances and phenomenon without implying difference. The larks by representation and by concept, fly into the poem, the core idea of 'phenomenal existence in a situation'<sup>97</sup> that over fourteen lines, signify the singular word of τὸ ὄν. 'Autumn Landscape' provide words for how Being dresses the landscape with what manifests as the essences of the phenomenon of Being whilst the Being that is within the ontic expresses the phenomena as appearances. The language of Being speaks 'the pined hawk...whizzing by' (9) and the 'Odd cows & horses [which] brouze about the lanes' (10) as an event of *eregnis* that is purely spoken, and therefore, poetic. Clare, in this poem, is not concerned with meaning or what the poem does. As he observes, the poem enacting 'the thing *qua thing*'<sup>98</sup> brings forth the poem's actuality.

Clare's poetic manifestations of Being reveal a 'oneness' whereby his descriptive poetry calls to 'the thing' to be a part of the ontology of the ontic. As mentioned, from a Heideggerian perspective, poetry that calls attention to and names Being is *essential* poetry. It reminds *Dasein* through the elevated language above all languages which is poetry, that the question of Being must not be forgotten.<sup>99</sup> Hence, arguments which focus on Clare's 'nature poetry in which the emphasis remains on the natural object'<sup>100</sup> risk a reductivism as they deny

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<sup>96</sup> Vendler, *The Music of What Happens*, 86.

<sup>97</sup> Hallward, *Badiou*, 298.

<sup>98</sup> Heidegger, 'The Thing', *Poetry Language, Thought*, 181.

<sup>99</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), Trans. of *Sein und Zeit*, 1927, 2.

<sup>100</sup> W.J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry From Wordsworth to the Present* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1980) 43.

Clare's poetry its art of 'is.' Clare's descriptive poetry inhabits its own ontological space as it calls Being' into a nearness.'<sup>101</sup> As Heidegger explains, calling Being names it:

The naming calls. Calling brings closer what it call....Thus it brings the presence of what was previously uncalled into a nearness.<sup>102</sup>

Ultimately, Clare shows that he is able to write like Hölderlin. He does not use Being to discuss 'the interpretive horizon for human destiny'<sup>103</sup>; nor does he create a realm of Between in which humanity is able to communicate with the gods. But, like Hölderlin, Clare unveils Being in the artistic work and makes discernible, this realm of the Between as a synonym for an overlapping.

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<sup>101</sup> Heidegger, 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 198.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Annemarie Gethmann-Sieft, 'Heidegger and Hölderlin: The Over-Usage of Poets in an Impoverished Time', Trans. Richard Taft, *Research in Phenomenology*, 19 (1989): 59-88 (63).

## Chapter Two

### ***Thinghood in The Shepherd's Calendar: Part One***

Heidegger argues that Hölderlin offers 'an experience of the essentially poetic.' David Halliburton writes in explanation and support: 'Hölderlin, more than most other poets, delivers himself to the challenge of discovery, living through, and speaking forth the mission of poetry in the modern world.'<sup>1</sup> Hölderlin is also held up by Heidegger as the poet of poets because essentially, he discloses in his poetic works (and at times his greatest lyrics and hymns), 'the fundamental history of Being...even though Being itself remains concealed.'<sup>2</sup> Clare's active participation in acts of onto-poēsis also allow him to be included within a discussion of poets who let Being be. If Hölderlin begins 'anew from an authentic experience of Greek art and thought'<sup>3</sup>, Clare's vivid immediacy supplies a verbal energy for those moments when it becomes possible to experience things as things.

A number of Clare's poetic works<sup>4</sup> testify to a listening to the *Saying* of Being, functioning as 'the letting happen of the advent of truth of what is.'<sup>5</sup> Many of his poems are concerned with the 'unanalyzable, untheorizable, untranslatable character of Heidegger's the fourfold.'<sup>6</sup> His nature poetry is an evocation of Being that accommodates presence and presentness in a manner that is extraordinary in its ordinariness. Clare's poetry escapes the

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<sup>1</sup> David Halliburton, *Poetic Thinking: An Approach to Heidegger* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981) 79. Hereafter, Halliburton, *Poetic Thinking*.

<sup>2</sup> Halliburton, *Poetic Thinking*, 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> 'Approach of Spring', *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, vol.1, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 520, 'The Primrose', *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, vol.1, 182. 'Flower Gathering', *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.2, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P. M. S. Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 99, 'Emmonsales Heath', *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.3, 363.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Origins of the Work of Art' *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 15-88 (72). Hereafter, 'OWA.'

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger's concept of the fourfold; earth, sky, gods and mortals is a mythical concept that is usually imported into philosophical logic which makes it the subject of speculation and difficulty. Heidegger himself is not clear regarding what he means by the fourfold but he does conjoin the fourfold with the idea of dwelling and intimates that the fourfold is what we call the world.

processes of cognition while recognising cognition. This provides the rationale for the ultimate argument being made in this chapter which claims that Clare in his mode as a poet of Being, writes poetry that enacts *Gelassenheit* (or ‘releasement.’<sup>7</sup>

The primary thrust of the chapter is to illustrate the dialectic between poetry’s active uncovering of originary Being and the thinging of things<sup>8</sup> in Clare’s *The Shepherd’s Calendar* 1827) in order to establish the independent and active presence of *Gelassenheit*. Clare’s poetry ‘things thingness’ from the same premise as Hölderlin’s poetic language. Points of tangency exist between Heidegger’s poetic philosophy and the non-representational thinking that discloses itself in the ‘letting be’ of poetry’ within Clare’s non-conceptual poetic thinking. The chapter presents Clare in this dimension through the first five months of *The Shepherd’s Calendar* from ‘January’ to ‘May.’ The chapter analyses the poems’ presentness, how they enter into and call attention to the originality of the rhythmical, the sonorous, the acoustic – to all the thingifying properties of language before what Heidegger regards as its disembodiment and fall into symbolism.<sup>9</sup> The ‘releasement’ and letting-go of, will prove to be *The Shepherd’s Calendar*’s chief Heideggerian quality.

To structure time in alignment with the processes of nature was not original to poetic composition. Precedents were offered by, among other works, James Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1730), according to Chilcott, who believes Thomson established the tradition.<sup>10</sup> Clare, when

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<sup>7</sup> This is translated as ‘releasement’ or ‘letting go.’ Heidegger’s concept of *Gelassenheit* can be explained as letting things be in their pure essences whatever may be their uncertainty. Please refer to the *Glossary*.

<sup>8</sup> ‘The Thinging of things’ is a term Heidegger uses in his essays ‘Origins of the Work of Art’ and ‘The Thing’ in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. It refers to the truth in a work outside of artistic theories, representations and interpretations.

<sup>9</sup> The term symbolism within a Heideggerian linguistic context alludes to representations of the essence of language as opposed to what presents itself in its coming into presence. The semiotic in language for Heidegger (and for Aristotle in *Peri Hermēneias*, c.I. I6a3—8.) is about how meaning is brought to empiricism and its transference into the semantic. Symbolism also has under its canopy Heidegger’s traditional picture of language which is the animation of dead signs with living meaning. His core aim in his efforts to bring language as language to language, is to ensure that ‘the sign continues to be experienced as essentially connected with an immediate pointing as was the case in classical Greek thought.’ Quoted from Joseph J. Kockelmans, ‘Language, Meaning and Ek-sistence’ *On Heidegger and Language* (Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1972) 4.

<sup>10</sup> ‘At the centre of the tradition lay Thomson’s ‘The Seasons’.... [and a] host of lesser imitations that followed Thomson’s model subscribed to a similar structure. Hugh Mulligan’s ‘The Months, six tinted sketches’ (1788) organised its conventional descriptions within the six months of February, April, June, August, October and

writing *The Shepherd's Calendar* may have been inculcating learnt practices from the 'extensive tradition of georgic poetry that was based upon the distinctive characteristics of the four seasons, or of individual months or particular times of day'<sup>11</sup> into his own poetic practices. Yet, Edmund Spenser's eclogues are the most explicit example of a model Clare uses to organise his version of cyclical changes.

Clare's *The Shepherd's Calendar* has much in common with 'A Shepheardes Calender' (1579) by Spenser. Both poems it seems, are concerned to describe the effect of the continuity of the seasons upon human life. Yet, Clare departs from Spenser in his depiction of local scenes and characters, whilst Spenser, besides dealing with poetic inspiration (October), and the hopeless love of a shepherd called Colin Clout for Rosalind (Januarye, Iune), seeks to comment on current events. Spenser seeks to warn his nation and his beloved Queen (Aprill and Nouember), of the dangers to England from internal and external threats. To achieve this, Spenser adopts an archaic allegorical style and employs a series of references to enliven those allegorical characters he creates.

Clare's *The Shepherd's Calendar* is a series of poems celebrating the seasonal nuances within the months of the year. Each month reveals its own distinctive nature with different presentations of the rhythms of agricultural labour and rural life. Verse tales are interspersed, the effect of which conveys more than a sense of local space and time. The 'precise genre pictures'<sup>12</sup> of the poetic sequences are located within the influence of the seasons and their effects upon a provincial culture, together with the experiences of the villagers both individually and collectively. The world is brought to the reader through the *everydayness* of Helpston village life, Clare treating this world as a heterocosm.

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December. James Hurdis' *The Favourite Village* (1800) was divided into the four seasons, as was Robert Bloomfield's immensely successful *The Farmer's Boy*, which appeared in the same year. James Grahame's *The Rural Calendar* (1797) portrayed the human and natural landscape in monthly sections, as did William Cole's *A Descriptive Review of the Year 1799*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Tim Chilcott, 'A Real World': *A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull UP, 1985) 35. Hereafter, 'A Real World.'

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and the Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 71.

*The Shepherd's Calendar* has been described by Edward Storey as a critical observation of everyday village life and its seasonal celebrations that Clare sets down with 'Chaucerian vigour.'<sup>13</sup> Tim Chilcott,<sup>14</sup> in his critical handling of *The Shepherd's Calendar* focuses on the significance of orality.<sup>15</sup> The impression of a shifting temporality upon the pastoral tradition is the locus for Richard Lessa's reading.<sup>16</sup> Commenting on Clare's objective which, finally must also mean subjective representation of a rural world, Lessa outlines the calendric soul of the poem and the measuring of life-sustaining human beings against the march of time. Discussing the poem as a pastoral, Lessa ascribes to it the ability to represent the 'totality of life in a rural English village as it really did exist.'<sup>17</sup>

In the present account of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, the poem announces a new authority within Clare. In contrast to other established perceptions that read him within established eighteenth century literary traditions, (Barrell,<sup>18</sup> Brownlow<sup>19</sup>) or in relation to the qualities and particularities of the pastoral tradition, this reading will argue that the poem is remarkable for its enactment of a 'letting be', central to which is the display of its own onto-textuality.<sup>20</sup> The constancy of the poem's participation in the natural world contributes to its metalanguage, its way of describing its own nature. Such a metalanguage derives from the poem's participation in the musicality of Being. No determinate tendency towards reason, no directive that leads toward a pre-determined end or drive towards interpretation, interferes with its freedom. *The Shepherd's Calendar* is an exemplification of Heidegger's conception

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Storey, *A Right to Song* (London: Methuen, 1982) 65.

<sup>14</sup> Chilcott, 'A Real World', 36.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Lessa, 'Time and John Clare's Calendar', *Critical Quarterly*, 24.1 (1982): 59-70. First published online 28<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Lessa, 'Time and John Clare's Calendar', 59.

<sup>18</sup> John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (London: Cambridge UP, 1972) engages Clare in the eighteenth century context of landscape and its appeal through channels such as poetry and the work of the 'great' eighteenth century painters.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) presents *The Shepherd's Calendar* through the rubric of the picturesque and topographical traditions in the chapter 'Adams Open Gardens' 67-96.

<sup>20</sup> A phrase referring to the ontological state of a poem and denotes its independence from what is associated with hermeneutics.

of a state in which one would ‘perceive but not know.’ The poem’s dialogue between poetry and Being is its own justification.

This can be said to be what inhabits the inner and open spaces of ‘January.’<sup>21</sup> Unconscious of anything that lies external to its horizon, ‘January’ both describes and narrates the way the temporal works its way through a typical January day. A synopsis of Clare’s detailed and picturesque twenty-four hour period follows:

The t[h]resher first thro darkness deep (31)  
Scaring the owlet from her prey (33)

...

The soodling boy that saunters round  
The yard on homeward dutys bound  
Now fills the troughs for noisy hogs (75-77)

...

The schoolboy still in dithering joys  
Pastime in leisure hours employs

...

Rolling up jiant heaps of snow  
As noontide frets its little thaw (101-06)  
The clouds of starnels dailey fly  
Blackening thro the evening sky (145-46)

...

The sun soon creepeth out of sight  
Behind the woods—& running night  
Makes haste to shut the days dull eye  
& grizzles oer the chilly sky (163-66)

...

Thus doth the winters dreary day  
From morn to evening wear away (221-22)

The way in which natural phenomena are apprehended by Clare shows how he gives primacy to his looking. Clare offers a sense of wholeness from the impression he creates. He is able to present ‘foreground and background, horizontal and vertical, focus and fringe.’<sup>22</sup> The few

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<sup>21</sup> John Clare, ‘*The Shepherd’s Calendar*’, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.1, eds. Eric Robinson David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 3-25. Hereafter, Clare, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*.

<sup>22</sup> Clare’s visual recording of the images he sees in front of him and how they are perceived has received some critical attention from commentators such as Paul Chirico, ‘Writing Misreadings: Clare and the Real World’ *The Independent Spirit: John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition*, ed. John Goodridge (Helpston: The John Clare



characters mentioned in the poem are submerged in a symbiotic economy with the lived experience of a rural village. Clare achieves this by using the present tense as a temporal marker which creates an extended presence of immediacy.

The expectation the poem will merge singular events into a bigger dynamic is deftly avoided. Clare's view of nature as a poetic concept is not a singular process as 'January' demonstrates. What is to the fore is a language that brings the concealed into a state of openness whereby Being can be what it is. 'January' shows itself to have an interrelatedness to Being because of what it signifies or points to -- which is itself. There are no allegorical frames of reference for the landscape: just the activity of rural life in the landscape. There are no metaphors of conscious self-reference through nature and no use of the animals as symbols. Hogs are 'noisy' (77) with 'flopping ear' (79)', .... 'turnips [are] sprouting thro the snows' (162) and hens are hens 'scratting all the day' (67). There are other such scenic events: 'cats their patient watch pursue / for birds' (72-73), the 'huddling geese as half asleep' (89), 'maidens fresh as summer roses.... / Haste home wi yokes & swinging pail' (169-71), / 'Or dairey doors are off the latch / On cheese or butter to regale / Or new milk reeking in the pale' (222-24). Here, Clare is not mounting a defence of the preservation of nature or rural life. The source of these scenic events is the ontic purity of 'letting it lie as it

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Society and The Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, 1994) 125-38 and Tim Chilcott, 'Poetic Apprenticeship: 1808-21', *A Real World & Doubting Mind: A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull UP, 1985) 1-33. Whilst this topic shall not detain the chapter, it would be useful to at least briefly consider the work of Chirico and Chilcott on Clare's different kinds of perception. Chirico in the paper that is cited above outlines a conflict that he sees between the 'transience, perception and representation' of Clare's natural observations and the presence of memory that at times results in Clare's poetic representations being 'fixed and limited,' and 'deprived of its familiar features.' (Paul Chirico, 'Writing Misreadings'), (126). Chilcott's efforts to diffuse Clare's celebrated sharply defined perspective have not been undertaken with a view to subtract from Clare or to comment on the poet using a pejorative approach. Fundamentally, Chilcott manages to place a dichotomy between the spatial rather than temporal in Clare's visual apprehension. His purpose is simply to illustrate that Clare's gaze is not as methodical as it has been traditionally received. The production of analogous correspondences with the pictures on the landscape are subject to inter-determinacy, and interruptions from what lies within the peripheries of his vision which claims Chilcott places Clare's 'perception beyond the purely declarative and explicit.' Tim Chilcott, *A Real World*, 47.

lies.’<sup>23</sup> ‘January’ defers the conceptualism of knowledge, and renders the possibility ‘that existence can be meaning-free.’<sup>24</sup>

This idea of un-intentionality or artistic purposelessness also runs with some fluidity through ‘January’s’ teleology. Clare’s disposition of poetic form does not seek to produce the pseudo-technical, which is so apparent in his mimicking of the eighteenth century poets Barrell discusses.<sup>25</sup> the poem creates space for itself ensuing marginalisation of other formations. Thus, the poem’s visual form is able to correlate with its narrative flow.. Its use of couplets is further affirmation of ‘January’s’ freedom to ‘let go.’ The premise of assonant resonances that stem from verbs continually rhyming with monosyllabic nouns such as ‘round’/ ‘bound’ (75-76), ‘Fly’/’sky’, (145-46) points to the process of construction and non-construction. Such a rhyming style discloses the absence of conceptuality, but the presentness of a persistent exemplification of *the thing*. The overt contradiction here is that rhyme schemes originate from, and are representative of, established styles and poetic tradition. One needs only to look at Pope or Dryden to see how this pattern of rhyming becomes a literary practice. Yet the sounds and rhythmical pulses that help to lend the poem both a sense of pace and framing belong to the property of natural forces. Mobilised and projected, the acoustic energy is potent enough to invite the absence of inauthenticity as it maintains its continuously metapoetic commentary on the text.

The internal texture of ‘January’ involves, that is, the language of ‘ostention.’ In his argument against the subsumption of texts by dogmatic hermeneutics, Paul H. Fry defends the property of language that differs from the mimetic and the semiotic in that it is not constructed.<sup>26</sup> Writing on texts that make visible ‘the disclosure of freedom through the

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<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, ‘What is Called Thinking?’ Lecture VIII, 206.

<sup>24</sup> Paul H. Fry, *A Defense of Poetry: Reflections on the Occasions of Writing* (California: Stanford UP, 1995) 13. Hereafter, Fry, *A Defense of Poetry*.

<sup>25</sup> John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (London: Cambridge UP, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> Fry, *A Defense of Poetry*, 11.

underdetermination of meaning—of freedom as such, that is, revealed in the release from the compulsion to signify,’<sup>27</sup> Fry defines them as displaying ‘ostention’ and describes their resistance to formal concretizations as the ‘ostensive moment.’<sup>28</sup> According to Fry, ostention ‘temporarily releases consciousness from its dependence on the signifying process.’<sup>29</sup> ‘January’ is one of these texts whose chief function is to signify its *this-ness* in antithesis to what it could be and its related nature. Its essential *ownness*,<sup>30</sup> to use Heidegger’s terminology, is able to elude ideology. Fry states ‘As a sign of the preconceptual, it [the text] bears....neither a symbolic relation to a referential register nor an iconic analogy to the existing world, but is merely indicial, disclosing neither the purpose nor the structure of existence but only existence itself.’<sup>31</sup> Reading ‘January’ in light of Fry’s ideas, it would seem that the poem is wholly resistant to those methods that are able to close texts down with compulsive pronouncements that become authoritative. However, ‘January’, like the rest of *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, is able to be identified with an established literary tradition.

The pastoral has a generic resonance with what Clare invigorates in his verse. But this generic correlative is not a ‘literary gesture’<sup>32</sup> to pastoralism. What usually occurs in the pastoral is a synthesis of reality and artificiality. In opposition to building simulacra and endorsing created artifice ‘Clare fully invigorates a dying tradition, animating it with an underlying pressure of felt reality.’<sup>33</sup> Cats are waiting to kill birds (70-73), geese walk around ‘silent and sad’ because of their displacement from their pond by the nightly ice until a hole in the ice is made (86-92), and the robin (137) and the wood pigeons (157-58) are tamed by hunger which makes them easy prey for the hunters (134) whom Clare implies, prowl the landscape. The different properties that persist within ‘January’ nevertheless leads to a

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> When *Dasein* faces its own existence or, when ontological exclusivity is achieved.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Chilcott, ‘A Real World’, 36.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

homogeneous whole which makes visible the occasion of *Gelassenheit* as 'January's' true consciousness.

The confinement of Clare's eye to natural detail as winter tries to resemble spring, is at the centre of 'February — A Thaw.'<sup>34</sup> Stanza six displays the harmony that is present between the non-ideological mode of the seeing and the instinct of *Gelassenheit*:

Odd hive bees fancying winter oer  
& dreaming in their combs of spring  
Creeps on the slab beside their door  
& strokes its legs upon its wing  
While wild ones half asleep are humming  
Round snowdrop bells a feeble note  
& pigeons coo of summer coming  
Picking their feathers on the cote

(41-48)

As the scene comes crowding upon the page, it owns a persisting serenity. The poem is not held in or by a frame such as a theme. Its theme is built on the language of undisturbance. Whilst this scene is conceived during moments of poetic creation, it is not struggling to convey the thoughts and behaviour of the insects and the birds through poetic and aesthetic processes. This may be explained by the oratorical images whereby Clare does not write what he imagines himself to see what he is talking about. Rather, he simply harnesses the energy of reality to produce the sensory but not figurative images. Both the style and the poem's kinaesthetic texture present the beauty of existence as it is ontologically:

A Calm of pleasure listens round  
& almost whispers winter bye  
While fancy dreams of summer sounds  
& quiet rapture fills the eye  
The sun beams on the hedges lye  
The south wind murmurs summer soft  
& maids hang out white cloaths to dry  
Around the eldern skirted croft

(81-88)

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<sup>34</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, 26-35.

The poem intensifies its existence by means of an alternative rhyme scheme and the roll of octosyllables. The delectation of having alighted on an independent ontology found in lines such as ‘The sun peeps thro the window pane’ (9) as ‘Ploughmen go whistling to their toils’ (33), ‘The dog creeps oer his winter pace / But cocks his tail & oer the fields / Runs many a wild & random chase’ (58-59) are all instances of what Wilhelm Dilthey regards as the moment in which reality becomes poetry.<sup>35</sup> What is also unconcealed is the non-presence of the imposed and the ‘said.’ The poem marshals what endures, which is the Being of its disposition to be, defying the literary apparatus whose purpose is to translate and adapt. Commenting on Lord Byron’s poetic authority which he believes is located in the Byronic poetic temper and consists of being ‘constant[ly] resistant to ‘not only interpretation, but even description’<sup>36</sup>, Brian Nellist seems to have captured a brief poetic commonality of Clare and Byron when he talks of those poems ‘living continuously in [their] own presentness.’<sup>37</sup> Nellist observes that ‘In the relative brevity of the steady moment, the constant shift of implication from which within the consistency of the style, in the refusal to imagine an ending that could be definitive, while at the same time never irresponsibly turning away from resolution, in the rendering of a kind of presentness so that the time of the poem is always becoming....thrusting itself into a ‘now,’ is the process of poetry that is familiar with its own separateness.’<sup>38</sup>

On account of the non-presence of an interpretative context, ‘February — A Thaw’ successfully highlights the limitations of hermeneutics, because it does not show itself to be attached to or encumbered with any theoretical position that can be analysed. This in turn,

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<sup>35</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Poetry and Experience*, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1985) 121.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Nellist, ‘Lyric Presence in Byron from the *Tales to Don Juan*’, *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, eds. Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1988) 39-77 (43).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

determines that its literary mechanism cannot be ‘formal[ly] concretised.’<sup>39</sup> ‘February — A Thaw’ dwells in a place within the sphere of influence in which Being’s call to poetry can be heard. Clare’s veil of a thin summer over winter speaks about what it hears and participates in the utterances that are always of the ‘is’ and little else.

The poetic letting be that is *Gelassenheit* is Clare’s referential register; it can be used to associate him with Being, the thing for Heidegger that is to be thought about. Clare contributes to the bringing forth of the essence of all things into the unconcealed and into the now. Hölderlin may be the paradigmatic poet who lifts our existence off the ground and places our nearness nearer to the nearness of the gods. Yet, Clare’s fluid and experiential poetic framing draws us closer to the omnipresence of nature.

The naturalism of Clare’s poetry fully embraces the essentiality of its own ontological essences. Writing poetry that is released through the continuous execution of dialectical exchanges between the poet and nature, Clare opens up a new dialogue regarding his own independent creative power.. Therefore, he can be claimed as an *essential* poet on the grounds of *Gelassenheit*. ‘March — The Thaw’<sup>40</sup> again sounds out this note of the momentousness of the momentary. Parallel to the objective representation of his rural world is ‘a letting-be of things as a letting-go of representational consciousness.’<sup>41</sup> Clare’s poems are ‘often seen as straightforward, possess[ing] a subtlety that is missed when their purely scenic and objective reference is emphasised.’<sup>42</sup> What ‘March’ gives us is the poetic image of the ontology of the thing. ‘Clare’s world-horizon was the horizon of things — the stones, animals, plants, people....’<sup>43</sup> The *thinging-ness* that pertains to ‘March’ answers to

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<sup>39</sup> Fry, *A Defense of Poetry*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, 33-35.

<sup>41</sup> Jennifer Anna Gosetti Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy 38 (New York: Fordham UP, 2004) 6. Hereafter, *Heidegger, Hölderlin*.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Birns, ‘The riddle nature could not prove’: hidden landscapes in Clare’s poetry’ *John Clare in Context*, eds. Geoffrey Summerfield, Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 189-220 (191).

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000) 153.

Heidegger's thinking about the essential nature of *thinging* in 'The Origins of the Work of Art' (1935-36). Similar to the artwork Heidegger discusses in this essay, 'March — The Thaw' projects the world it belongs in, and announces a way of being in art.

Before Clare takes nature back to the root of the totality of its Being in 'March', there is a prelude to the poem which provides an instance of the cyclical thawing that pre-empt the coming of spring:

Snows melt in floods & tumble free  
 (57)  
 ...  
 The gladden swine bolt from the sty  
 & round the yard in freedom run  
 The dogs stretched at their leisure lye  
 Beside the cottage in the sun  
 Hens leave their roost wi cackling calls  
 To see the barn door clear from snow  
 & cocks fly up the mossy walls  
 To clap their spangld wings & crow  
 ...  
 (33-40)  
 Thus nature of the spring will dream  
 (65)

The prematurity of spring lifts the veil from off the lifelessness of winter before 'nature soon sickens of her joys/ & all is sad & dumb again' (73-74). The alternating rhyme scheme of the eight-line stanzas evokes the vitality of the natural world. The picturesque scenes of 'ducks & geese.../ Splash[ing] in the yard...(3-4) / The mavis thrush wi wild delight / Upon the orchards dripping tree' (25-26) / and 'The barking dogs by lane & woods / Driv[ing] sheep afield from foddering ground' (41-42) pave the way for Clare's presentation of the phenomenal world in 'March — The Thaw' as 'thinging' becomes an event that gathers and stays the presence of things that 'world the world' and the world they are in.

In his essay 'The Origins of the Work of Art' Heidegger demystifies 'the thinging of things'<sup>44</sup> in his extended analogy of the jug and essences; he claims 'you will begin to re-collect in your own thinking a basic human grasp of the meaning of things, which will open up afresh a basic human relationship to them.'<sup>45</sup> This idea of 'the thinging of things'<sup>46</sup> is itself able to 'thing' a non-theorising doubleness. It speaks of the way in which something comes into its own when recalled to its originality and freed from the abstractions and distractions of associated meanings. Seeing or apprehending the thing within things is speaking, or, is very close to the Husserlian programme of phenomenology in which the primitivism of the purest essences is the directed end. The 'recalling to origins or a reversion to the primeval'<sup>47</sup> within an artistic context can only be 'a positive regression'<sup>48</sup> for Heidegger. In going back, thinking moves forward to 'the full concreteness, the onefoldness of the manifold, of actual life-experience.'<sup>49</sup>

The presence of the ontological substance within the scenes of 'March'<sup>50</sup> is indicative of 'the presence of something present....coming into its own, appropriatively manifest[ing] and determin[ing] itself.'<sup>51</sup> This is very close to what Heidegger offers as a legitimate and fecund way of accessing the core of 'the thing.' He argues: 'If we let the thing be present in its thinging from out of the wordling world, then we are thinking of the thing as thing.'<sup>52</sup> Besides the differing stanzaic formation to 'January' and 'February', 'March' also has a different inclination which is contained in an overshadowing of the present presencing. The poetic terrain on which it dwells has a discernible sense of an inherited sensibility. This proves to be a hindrance to the utterances of unconditionedness of what is 'set...against...the

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<sup>44</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) xvii.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, 36-49.

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, 'The Thing' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 165-186 (177).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.



forms of representations [which] breaks the hold we have on things and allows them to come into their own as beings.<sup>53</sup> ‘March’s’ poetic sentiment at times is to ‘thing’ the conditions and consequences of the idiosyncratic meteorological fluctuations a March month brings upon human activity, livestock and the ecology. But its *thingingness* discloses its world that is in the midst of the event of a calling world through the hybridity of poeticism, imagination and aestheticism as ‘existence gives way to occurrence.’<sup>54</sup> The presence of Being remains a phenomenon that can still be heard. But Being’s coming into *the Open* is less audible in the metaphysical sense.

Nonetheless, the poem is reflective of the scenes ‘*thinging*’ their uninterrupted purity as they project onto the landscape ‘of many weathers’ (1) [that] ‘Will thread a minutes sun shine wild & warm’ (17). It illustrates that the ordinariness of ‘the ploughman on the elting soil’ (16) ‘The chockolate berrys on the ivy boughs’ (48), or how ‘A cowslip peep will open faintly coy / [and] Soon seen & gathered by a wandering boy’ (25-26) have the ability to endow unremarkable objects with the truth of their reason for being. The scenes are their own statements even though they are a part of a literary text. In its depiction of how human mentality and activity is able to adapt to the blustering winds and rains of March, Clare’s lyrical sustaining of the movement of his world is aided by the poem’s clear path through the plethora of events. The poem’s language brings to the place where things can be grasped, and different associations perceived for which the poem provides a ‘*Clearing*.’ A Romantic anticipation of Heidegger is helpful here. Writing on the capacity of poetry’s artistic *saying* to perform the ‘unbeing’<sup>55</sup> of what was pre-existing, on, in effect, what Heidegger would later

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<sup>53</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, *Heidegger’s Estrangements: Language, Truth, and Poetry in the Later Writings* (New Haven, Yale UP, 1989) 49. Hereafter, *Heidegger’s Estrangements*.

<sup>54</sup> Bruns, *Heidegger’s Estrangements*, 95.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

refer to as poetry's nature to 'break open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual',<sup>56</sup> Shelley asserts:

[Poetry] 'awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world; and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar, it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian (heavenly) light stand thenceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them, as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it co-exists.'<sup>57</sup>

The *being-ness* of Being of 'The stooping ditcher in the water....' (53), the daws whose heads seem powered oer wi snow (78), '...lanes or brooks were sunbeams love to lye' (24), or 'the top twigs of the oddling bushes' (86), incites the *thingingness* of the rest of the poem's essences to be called into absolute presence. But after this phenomenal and ontological act begins, and begins again by virtue of it being an unending process, it accommodates a re-conceptualisation of the material world of 'March.'

Parallel to the poem's separate presencing of a thing residing as thing, the poem can be read as a historical document that has captured and preserved dead traditions and a way of life that has disappeared. The sombre tale of the murder of 'A maid at night by treacherous love decoyd (202)' at the end of the poem is perhaps also indicative of the village tales that were told on winter evenings.<sup>58</sup> But to lay emphasis on the poem's status as a quasi-historical source would be to impose on it a fixed construction, whereby 'March' would become 'used up' in the process of signification. 'March' refuses to retreat from the world it opens up but takes up intermittent moments of residency in the engendering of another reality which is the result of an imagined consciousness. 'Clowns [who] mark the threetning rage of march pass bye / & and clouds wear thin & ragged in the sky (163-64)' and the shepherd boy 'Wi fancy

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<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, 'OWA', 72.

<sup>57</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley: *The Major Works including Poetry, Prose and Drama*, eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) 681.

<sup>58</sup> Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 82.

thought his loneliness beguiles / Thinking the struggling winter hourly bye, (102-03)' exemplify Clare's fleeting excursions into abstraction. But the ontological priority of the poem is to communicate the enlivened sensory essences that the poem's world 'things.' The fundamental moments of 'March' are bound up in when it 'things' what was already there, waiting. The rhymes within 'March' demonstrate how the poem lends support to the rhythmic nature of its existence. 'March' demonstrates the rhythms of its ontological inclination. It attempts to embrace a strict metrical pattern while emphasising cadence:

While in the pale sunlight a watery brood  
 Of swooping white birds flock about the flood  
 Yet winter seems half weary of its toil  
 And round the ploughman on the elting soil  
 Will thread a minutes sun shine wild and warm  
 Thro the raggd places of the swimming storm

(13-18)

'March' exposes the balance between technique and intuition. The fluidity of the iambic pentameters helps to keep the poem enunciating what responds to its call, despite the rhythms bringing near, what has been *said* and established. The poem's 'way to be' has evolved through its other consciousness which, phenomenologically, provides another existence in which the poem may exist. By this, it is meant that 'March' is a text that crosses its poetic frontiers and its events and images are able to be intuited beyond the limits of a representational<sup>59</sup> psychology.

As the poem presents the picturesque nature of rural living, it also transmutes poetry's attempt to project onto the stormy path of 'March', a synthesis of the real and the abstract. The human experiences of the characters, imagination and reality come together in a poetic mimesis of reality. The natural scenes of rural life and its related activities spark off moments

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<sup>59</sup> According to Heidegger, this is the type of thinking that takes an almost prescriptive path and leads to a determined end.

of newness in thinking about how things are able to reveal their presence. The river in 'March' does not flow, it 'rivers' and when 'the white butterfly as in amaze' / .... settle[s] on the glossy glass to gaze (129-30)' it presences its 'thing presence' in an absolute unity with Being. It is as if there is a white haze giving of itself phenomenologically in its presencing as a white fluttering thing before it comes into the processes of recognition and representation as a butterfly. What 'March' is doing is re-focusing our attention on the relation between consciousness and the world. Where this leads is to a thinking that takes poetry away from the functional, the ideological and the logocentric and its textual premises. 'March' brings closer the idea that poetry is not an object or a subject, but a thing that is able to effect Being as a mode of appearing and concealing and thus is able to disclose 'what is' and 'how that is 'is'. In a poem entitled 'Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself' (1954)<sup>60</sup> Stevens upholds the Heideggerian quest to overthrow representational thinking and to see things in poems as themselves as they shun representations and come into their own. As Heidegger writes, 'The poem which then stands in its own right, will itself throw light

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<sup>60</sup> 'Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself'

At the earliest ending of winter,  
In March, a scrawny cry from outside  
Seemed like a sound in his mind.

He knew that he heard it,  
A bird's cry, at daylight or before,  
In the early March wind.

The sun was rising at six,  
No longer a battered panache above snow...  
It would have been outside.

It was not from the vast ventriloquism  
Of sleep's faded papier-mache...  
The sun was coming from the outside.  
That scrawny cry--It was  
A chorister whose c preceded the choir.  
It was part of the colossal sun,

Surrounded by its choral rings,  
Still far away. It was like  
A new knowledge of reality

Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955) 534.

directly on the other poems. And so when we next read the poems, we feel that we had always understood them in this way. And it is well for us to feel this.’<sup>61</sup> Here is Stevens attending to how unusual (in terms of unaccustomed and unfamiliar) the thinking experience can be when the poem occurs as Being:

The poem of pure reality, untouched  
By trope or deviation, straight to the word,  
Straight to the transfixing object, to the object

At the exact point at which it is itself,  
Transfixing by being purely what it is,  
...

The eye made clear of uncertainty, with the sight  
Of simple seeing, without reflection. We seek  
Nothing beyond reality. Within it,<sup>62</sup>

The site for perception within this poem is “The picture of reality”<sup>63</sup> which is set against the reality of the imagination. The things are things within themselves and not something that stems from ‘the listener’s epistemological desire.’<sup>64</sup> Its insistence to hear the thing itself is its hermeneutic of truth and, in Stevens’ poem, truth is dependent on ‘How.’ Tactically, it presents a sense of otherness but this is soon downplayed as the poem returns to sounding out ‘the letting of itself be known’<sup>65</sup> as it naturalises the ‘thingness’ of the ‘thing’ rather than the idea of the ‘thing’ in words.

*The Shepherd’s Calendar* hinges on a metaphysics of *here-ness*. ‘April’<sup>66</sup> illustrates this lucidly through the medium of something close to transubstantiation; if Being engenders the season, the season is a gathering depth of Being which shines forth only as it veils itself:

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<sup>61</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being* (London: Vision, 1949) 255.

<sup>62</sup> ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’, Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, 465-89 (471).

<sup>63</sup> Alan Filreis, *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 257.

<sup>64</sup> Stefan Holander, *Wallace Stevens and the Realities of Poetic Language* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 141.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

<sup>66</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, 50-57.

Sweet month thy pleasures bids thee be  
The fairest child of spring  
& every hour that comes with thee  
Comes some new joy to bring  
The trees still deepen in their bloom  
Grass greens the meadow lands  
& flowers with every morning come  
As dropt by fairey hands

The field & gardens lovely hours  
Begin and end with thee  
For whats so sweet as peeping flowers  
& bursting buds to see  
What time the dews unsullied drops  
In burnish[d] gold distils  
On crocus flowers unclosing tops  
& drooping daffodils

...

Along each hedge & sprouting bush  
The singing birds are blest  
& linnet green & speckld thrush  
Prepare their mossy nest  
On the warm bed thy plain supplies  
The young lambs find repose  
& mid thy green hills baking lies  
Like spots of lingering snows

(‘April’, 89-104, 121-28)<sup>67</sup>

Aside from the alternative rhyme scheme, the poem, typified by this passage, has no style. ‘Nature seems to take the pen out of [Clare’s] hand and write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power.’<sup>68</sup> The scene is written in graphic detail, it is as if ‘April’ has a ceaseless ability to comprehend the moving and the vital. The constancy of sublime moments created by the ‘breathing world’<sup>69</sup> of the flowers, field gardens, crocus flowers, daffodils and

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 53-55.

<sup>68</sup> Preface to *Golden Treasury Selection*, quoted from John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth’s Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954) 3.

<sup>69</sup> John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime*, 99.

young lambs, is a portrayal of perfect symmetry with living nature and a subtle undersense of function.

What we are presented with in 'April' is poetry that 'is opposed to closure and withdrawal in favour of origin and essence and that which is for its own sake.'<sup>70</sup> 'April' embraces this concept by depicting its 'epitomic state of the letting-go or releasement of language into its own.'<sup>71</sup> Its pure expression brings to the act of poēsis, a singular occasion of an 'ostensive moment.'<sup>72</sup> The singleness of this moment, however, is subject to a state of proliferation. 'April' like 'The blossoms [that] open one by one' (7) increases the intensification of its ostensive moment 'while she [April] smiles' (20). As the buds continually open and ripen (157) under its 'calm hours' (49), that which has the propensity to interrupt the textual 'is-ness' of the poem is not allowed to impinge upon the 'Pleasures that come like lovely things' (151). The ostensive moment is endowed with a sense of buoyancy and light heartedness. This is the result of its alternation between iambic dimeter and iambic pentameter and is reflective of the cadences of spring. The short lines and mixture of metrical feet that express their rhythms from the alternate rhymes, do so within octaves, helping to build an intimate picture of 'April's' ability to cause 'some new joy....' (92) in the natural world because With [April] all nature finds a voice (115).

'May' attends to *Gelassenheit* poetry as phūsīs<sup>73</sup> and the nature of language, which 'is preserved as that which cannot be subsumed or assimilated into our orders of signification...'<sup>74</sup> The poetic framing of the material beauty of the natural world of 'May' and the harmonious diversity of its wildlife's activities requires, in Heidegger's terms, 'the

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<sup>70</sup> Gosetti Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin*, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Bruns, *Heidegger's Estrangements*, 120.

<sup>72</sup> Fry, *A Defense of Poetry*, 28.

<sup>73</sup> The word denotes the nature of the thing as opposed to the artificial. Heidegger uses this early Greek word to mean itself.

<sup>74</sup> Bruns, *Heidegger's Estrangements*, 121.

renunciation of the violent logos [and] that which overpowers the overpowering.’<sup>75</sup> The poem’s naturalness radiates an indomitable sense of the unorganised and the unstrained. ‘May’ also borders on, and at times, indulges in the moralising Schiller demands of the sentimental poet, examples of which will be highlighted and illustrated as the poem’s discussion progresses.

In ‘The Origins of the Work of Art’ Heidegger again outlines that ‘the preconception shackles reflection on the Being of any given being.’<sup>76</sup> ‘May’ does not reflect Heidegger’s concern. As the poem seeks to capture the reality of the poem’s phenomenal world, a space within the poem’s reflective thinking becomes amenable for the poem to occupy as poem *qua* poem. Here, it is able to manifest its significant void, existing without antagonism, amongst the idea of it as an object produced. ‘May’ affirms the dual potency of nature to shun any ‘systematic investigation of the “beautiful in nature”’<sup>77</sup> and release nature from any sort of ontological reduction by aesthetic thought or theories of art. The ‘aesthetic life-experience’<sup>78</sup> of the ‘swallows chimney song’ (4) ‘And hedge row crickets notes that run / From every bank that fronts the sun / And swathy bees about the grass / That stops wi every bloom they pass’ (5-8) are seen in their ‘untouched actuality.’<sup>79</sup>

‘May’ is a poem of correspondences, articulations that reach beyond metaphors to embody the concept of how time metamorphoses into beauty. In what can be referred to characteristically as the non-descriptiveness of a May month, ‘May’ shares a resonance with

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<sup>75</sup> Heidegger, ‘What is Metaphysics?’ *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993) 97; Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1978.

<sup>76</sup> Heidegger, ‘OWA’, 156.

<sup>77</sup> Theodor Adorno, ‘Beginning with Schelling’ *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, Trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul; London and Boston, 1984) 91. In addition, see the chapter ‘The Picturesque Environment’ to obtain a clearer view of the debate Jonathan Bate sets out that addresses the nature of nature and the ideologising of the environment that circumvents its natural beauty in Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 119-152.

<sup>78</sup> Heidegger, ‘OWA’, 3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*



what Paul de Man has referred to as ‘the ontology of the poetic.’<sup>80</sup> ‘Along the wheat when the skys grow dim’ (236), in the poem’s rhythms and flowing through ‘the green surviving trees / That wave ....in the breeze / & waking whispers’ (143-45), the ‘unhiddenness’ of the nothing of the poem is to be found and energises ‘May’s ontic sensuality.’ However, *Gelassenheit* is not the sustained projection for ‘May.’ *Gelassenheit* is in attendance, yet the poetic reflections on nature being a *Being-for-itself* is what produces the delight in nature Clare offers in abundance.

Choosing a non-stanzaic form once more which is accompanied by an *aa/bb* rhyming formation, Clare assimilates the pure existent absoluteness of what is real into the texture of the poem’s aesthetic. Four different parts of the poem translate the same privileged moments that charts what unfolds according to its own determination. At the beginning of the poem, children play innocently, and then we see, and vicariously come to know, ‘the driving boy at work’ (39-46) and the youth (47-102). Part three of the poem sees Clare in Schillerian sentimental mode, conveying how nature is able to communicate with humans. Part four sets forth the beauty that May causes to be so expressive and unconcealed, in conjunction with the totalising impact of nature upon Clare’s village-world.

The first part of the poem is Blakean in its portrayal of children being free to enjoy childhood as if on ‘The Echoing Green.’ They run and play in innocence ‘Unthinking in their jovial cry’ (27). Similar to the children in Blake’s poem, time is the enemy that will cease their cavorting. They play ‘Viewing wi jealous eyes on the clock (22) / That time shall come when they shall lye / As lonely & as still as they [their dead relatives]’ (26-29). Parenthetically, it is interesting to note that the concepts of Being according to Blakean and Heideggerian conceptual thinking come together without belonging together here. The fourfold approach to Being that is also deployed on a grander and more complex scale by the

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<sup>80</sup> Paul De Man, ‘The Dead-end of Formalist Criticism’ in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Minniesota UP, 1983) 232. Quoted by Jonathan Bate in *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991) 104.

visionary poet (the Four Zoas, Luvah, Tharmas, Urizen, and Urthona) and the unmetaphysical / ontological philosopher (Earth, Sky, Gods, and Mortals) represent the cosmology of the universe and understanding authentic Being, respectively. Within Clare's initial section of 'May', ontological approaches one might associate with Blake and Heidegger are situated in a process that embraces the unity of the present. Being is appearing and withdrawing in beautiful nature on the earth and calls to the mortals under the sky and the gaze of gods. The maids (176), the young girls (215), the old dames (216), the schoolboys (290), the parson (301) and the old man (248) do not wait in stillness and in silence to hear the call of authentic Being when it summons itself to itself. They are embraced and incorporated into its nearness as it 'worlds' and 'things' in the form of its potential to open possibilities 'Around each village day by day' (271).

The principle of the natural and the 'something else' contributes to the poem's poetic design, and provides the poem with its dual sense of construction. With affective simplicity, Clare's reader is introduced to a character whose purpose is to remind the reader of the larger and wider literary context of Clare's nature writing. Enjoying nature's delight as an untainted physical structure, force and system, the 'driving boy'

cock[s] his hat & turn[s] his eye  
 On flower & tree & deepning skye  
 & oft bursts loud in fits of song  
 & whistles as he reels along

(39-44)

Clare's illumination of how the individual is able to experience feelings of connectedness and express a passion for nature points to the Romantic ideas of individuation and individuality. The nature we encounter in 'May' is not being represented as a character or by any defining ideological personality. It is itself, eternally in the 'is' of the moment. The driving boy's

experiences too, are symbolic of how nature is to be participated in through microcosmal means.

Part two of the poem, from lines 39 onwards, takes considerable interest in the life of 'the youth.' There is an event of disunion here whereby the pure otherness as it occurs becomes occluded. This takes place because Clare turns to consciously interpreting the joys of the sensuously ontic:

On every thing that meets his eye  
Young lambs seem tempting him to play  
Dancing & bleating in his way  
Wi trembling tails & pointed ears  
They follow him & loose their fears  
He smiles upon their sunny faces  
& feign woud join their happy races  
The birds that sing on bush & tree  
Seem chirping for his company  
& all in fancys idle whim  
Seem keeping holiday but him  
He lolls upon each resting stile  
To see the fields so sweetly smile  
To see the wheat grow green and long  
& list the weeders toiling song

(56-70)

The experiences of 'the youth' become overrun like 'the may' fields' (154) with the 'corn poppys' (151) which also mirrors the sense of abundance in the sentence 'Each hedge is loaded thick wi green' (103). Here, the poem enters its third section which is marked by nature adopting a pedagogic role. Destructive human intervention is what the poem wishes to communicate through a moralistic medium. What develops is the sense that there is a dichotomy between humanity and nature as the age-old scenario of the destroyer destroying the destructible is played out:

While wood men still on spring intrudes  
& thins the shadow solitudes  
Wi sharpened axes felling down  
The oak trees budding into brown

Were as they crash upon the ground  
A crowd of labourers gather round  
& mix among the shadows dark  
To rip the crackling staining bark  
From off the tree & lay when done  
The rolls in lares to meet the sun  
Depriving yearly were they come  
The green wood pecker of its home

(111-22)

The schism Clare demonstrates between nature and humanity shows him to be a ‘prophet of his own belief’<sup>81</sup> in the oneness humanity shared with nature in a pre-lapsarian world. This relationship between humanity and nature has been made toxic, or has disappeared in the post-lapsarian era. Adam and Eve, the initial caretakers of nature that tended to the Garden and the animals, are now the ruinators of nature as the boundaries between humanity and nature grows further apart. The lines that speak of the trees that are ‘stript of boughs’ (141) do not communicate the ‘ethical lessons [of which] Wordsworth is the supreme poet’,<sup>82</sup> but does reveal some homogeneity with the sentiment Schiller demands. Clare is not simply in descriptive mode; his meditations attest to a subjective awareness that incorporates an emotional respect for nature and a sadness that stems from a reflective consciousness. The white of the naked tree barks, stripped so adeptly they shine like bones in the sun, convey an imperishable truth that nature’s ‘contents are at any given time only partially retrieved or retrievable.’<sup>83</sup> Alongside this relationship between feeling and image, consciousness and perception, lies the pedagogical moralising that is not constant in Clare but is, at the least, temperamental. The concentration of vivid sensation and activity is punctuated by the activity, gradual or sudden, of the context of humanity and nature in harmony by means of a piratical language.

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<sup>81</sup> Paul H. Fry, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008) 65. Hereafter, Fry, *Poetry of What We Are*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2003) 83.

When Clare addresses nature, he strives to bring humanity into closer proximity with it:

& scarlet starry points of flowers  
Pimpernel dreading nights & showers  
Oft call'd 'the shepherds weather glass'  
That sleep till suns have dried the grass  
Then wakes & spreads its creeping bloom  
Till clouds or threatening shadows come  
Then close it shuts to sleep again  
Which weeders see & talk of rain

(163-70)

Clare is encouraging humanity to see nature as a companion ('& talk to every blossom wild / Fond as a parent to a child' (199-200) rather than a mere resource, or at worst, an adversary. Nature should be inhabited and delighted in and should not be the sole product of worship by aesthetes such as poets (184). And yet there should be times when nature should be left untouched and unappropriated to be allowed to spend time in its 'lonely joys' (186).

Both Clare and Wordsworth's comprehension of nature is by no means homogenous or mutual. But both poets apprehend nature as 'our own nonhuman existence.'<sup>84</sup> As the same critic, Paul Fry argues, 'In Wordsworth, there is always in some way an evocation of Being as such.'<sup>85</sup> Wordsworth's sonnet 'Mutability' (1821) does not see Wordsworth aspiring to learn more of nature as he admires flowers and birds. This poem deals with the power of time as it is experienced historically in relation to its effects on ideas and institutions. And yet, in this seemingly single process, Wordsworth manages to evoke the nature of Being through an analogy of music. It is only the philosophical listener who hears the notes.<sup>86</sup> However, 'It is only by holding the various notes of the scale in the memory, or by hearing them with historical attention, that the concord can be heard. Those who are too deeply involved in the

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<sup>84</sup> Fry, *Poetry of What We Are*, 67.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>86</sup> Geoffrey Durrant, *William Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969) 152.

process itself will not perceive the harmony.’<sup>87</sup> In his celebrated poem, ‘I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud’ (1807),<sup>88</sup> Wordsworth outlines the comfort nature provides in the swaying flowers. When he is restless, ‘or in pensive mood’ the daffodils come to his mind once more (14). His description of ‘ten thousand [of the daffodils] dancing in the breeze’, fills his room on ‘the couch where he lies’ (13). At once, the ambience of the room is changed from a space which is mainly functional to one filled with nature’s sensuousness. This Wordsworthian trait, to always make ‘nature appear’,<sup>89</sup> is what Clare evokes in ‘May.’

May’s’ third section not only sounds out an ecological note; it also acts as a reminder that nature does not stand in need of naturalising. In its ontological capacity, it supersedes even the abstract authority of ostention by holding in place the *Gelassenheit* coordinates of ‘let go’ and ‘be.’ Nature does not *become* nature on account of any ideological applications or theoretical appropriations. It is nature by virtue of it not being ‘otherwise.’ Clare’s poetic presentation of nature where ‘The moon looks down on the lovely may’ (342) celebrates the gathered presence of Being by letting that Being be, unconsciously in an organic, simple and non-systematised way. The poetic projection of the latter and the continued salute to Romanticism’s ethos, which, desires that all that is natural should run wild and free, continues its advance into the final section of ‘May.’

The portrayal of the originality of nature untouched is the source of nourishment for Clare’s picturesque images. The poetry is a triumphant embodiment of how ‘the speaker in the poem finds himself in privileged proximity to what is authentic and enduring in nature.’<sup>90</sup> Implications of the Edenic phase are suggested. The poetry is ‘already’, and intentionally so, in order to embrace the vivacity of the already there:

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill, The Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984) 303-04.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1992) 158.

& the seven stars & charleses wain  
 Hangs smiling oer green woods agen  
 The heaven rekindles all alive  
 Wi light the may bees round the hive  
 Swarm not so thick in the mornings eye  
 As stars do in the evening skye  
 All all are nestling in their joys

...

(345-51)

So thickly now the pasture crowds  
 In gold & silver sheeted clouds  
 As if the drops in april showers  
 Had wood the sun & swoond to flowers  
 The book resumes its summer dresses  
 Pearling neath grass & water cresses  
 & mint & flag leaf swording high  
 Their blooms to the unheeding eye

(327- 34)

The naturalness of nature, its innate sensuousness and aestheticism emphasise the unhindered rapture that is its distinctive ontology. ‘The yellow hammer’ (367) and ‘The little golden crested wren’ (389) criss-cross with the weaving ditty of the nightingale (363) whilst all the time, the sun beams rest on the banks (368). Clare is doing what Keats accomplishes in ‘To Autumn’ (1820) which is to psychologise ‘the aesthetic appreciation of wild landscape’<sup>91</sup> as he shows how nature is able to play upon the human desire for peace and serenity by enticing it with what legitimises it as nature.

The organicism of nature’s beauty that is monopolising the landscape where Clare is situated implies that the idea of nature as a subject is suggestive of a *being-for-itself*. In other words, nature’s beauty is beautiful because the vigour of its impulses can resist the theoretical projections that can be placed upon it. Hence, it stands delightful and invigorating because it enjoys a status of ‘splendid isolation.’ But there is always violence done against the existence

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<sup>91</sup> Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 122.

of what exists in itself, and where there are words, there is historicity, linguistic burdens and external determinants that are engaged in a course of action which involves some degree of pre-existent interpretation. Language is always ‘in its predicative moment.’<sup>92</sup> It is not a resource that comes unburdened. Language does not comply with Heidegger’s determination that language just ‘gives.’<sup>93</sup> ‘Self-consciously gesturing “elsewhere”<sup>94</sup>—back out to a “history” in which it is embedded’<sup>95</sup> language transfers, but also simultaneously, it unintentionally defers its intentions. In a sense, it is always ahead of itself by way of what goes before it. But this is the situation that instrumental language finds itself in and not language at the poetic level. Poetry is that medium for Heidegger which can take on the characteristics of a *lichtung*.<sup>96</sup> It is able to bring into *the Open* that which confers world and reality. As he establishes when discussing Hölderlin and the essence of his poetry, ‘poetry is the essence of things.’<sup>97</sup> Thus, poetry is by no means a simulacrum of nature’s ontology. What nature fundamentally is, and continually presents as nature, is what ontology apprehends and weaves into the idea of onto-poetics.

The ontology of the poetic is an idea that Gaston Bachelard also discusses and can be found in his 1958 monograph *The Poetics of Space*.<sup>98</sup> Bachelard considers how the temporal and interpretation can be surpassed. This, he believes, is accomplished by what Jonathan Bate

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<sup>92</sup> Fry, *A Defense of Poetry*, 54.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Es gibt’ is German for: ‘there is’, literally: ‘it gives.’

<sup>94</sup> Theresa M. Kelley, *J. M. Turner, Napoleonic Caricature, and Romantic Allegory*, 379. Quoted by Damian Walford Davies, Introduction, *Romanticism, History, Historicism: Essays on an Orthodoxy*, ed. Damian Walford Davies (London: Routledge, 2009) 3.

<sup>95</sup> Damian Walford Davies, Introduction, *Romanticism, History, Historicism: Essays on an Orthodoxy*, ed. Damian Walford Davies (London: Routledge, 2009) 3.

<sup>96</sup> In German the word *Lichtung* means a clearing, for example, a clearing in the woods. Since its root is the German word for light (*Licht*), it is sometimes also translated as ‘lighting.’ In Heidegger’s work it refers to the necessity of a clearing in which anything at all can appear *the clearing* in which some thing or idea can show itself, or be unconcealed. See *Glossary*.

<sup>97</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, Trans. Keith Hoeller (New York: Humanity-Prometheus, 2000) 60. Originally published in German as *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981); *Gesamtausgabe: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-76*, vol.4), ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1981, 1996, Vittorio Klostermann.

<sup>98</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at how we Experience Intimate Places* (New York: Orion Press, 1964).



terms 'a mode of reading that is a listening rather than an interrogation.'<sup>99</sup> During this act, the pure speaking language of *The Shepherd's Calendar* reveals the occurrence of Being's own way of occurring as the truth of the work from within the space of its happening.

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<sup>99</sup> Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 154.

## Chapter Three

### **Reflective Thinking: The Shepherd's Calendar: Part Two**

The first five months of *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827) demonstrates how the impulse of the 'pure saying' functions in the work. The poems show their *thingness*, denying any 'subservience to human preoccupations.'<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the poems from 'June' through to 'December', this chapter discusses how Clare's poetry leads us to think about 'calls for thinking.'<sup>2</sup> Correspondingly, this discussion will align, for the most part, Clare's poetic identity within Heidegger's poetical framework. And yet this chapter also asks whether Clare can be discussed as a Heideggerian poet, a poet who bears some similitude to Hölderlin (outside of the nationalistic agenda Heidegger ascribes to his work), or whether he is an independent poet of Being, articulating the essences of Being on his own terms.

Clare writes about Helpston as if it were a heterocosm, or paradise yet to be discovered. The way in which Clare writes about the month of 'June' in *The Shepherd's Calendar* seems to epitomise the Eden he lost and sought forever to regain. In another poem that is not found in *The Shepherd's Calendar*, but also has the title 'June'<sup>3</sup>, the pleasure that can be gained from the beautiful seems otherworldly, as the first two sentences show:

Go where I will nought but delight is seen  
The blue & luscious sky is one broad gleam

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought* by Martin Heidegger (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* A Translation of *Was heist Denken?* Trans. J. Glenn Gray, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968) 121.

<sup>3</sup> John Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.2 eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 103. Poem dated Mid-1820's-early 1830's.

Similar to an untitled poem from Clare's later poems<sup>4</sup> whose title again is 'June', the month is presented as 'a gladsome month that gaily comes / In fragrant gown of many colored blooms' (1-2). The *this-ness* of summer in 'June'<sup>5</sup> from *The Shepherd's Calendar*, exemplifies the listening to 'what is' nature in tune with itself:

summer is in flower & nature's hum (1)  
Is never silent round her sultry bloom (2)  
Wi' glittering dance....reeling in the sun (4)  
& green wood fly & blossom haunting bee (5)

Nature's essential essences are held and stabilised in nature's own space. The energy of the natural world 'endorse[s] the intimate connection between word and thing.'<sup>6</sup> The descriptive concentration of the words ensures that everything in this scene is totally expressed. Summer becomes a metaphor for animation and is *in* the flower. The natural objects are never silent. Whether by action or by fragrance, they contribute to the ontology of nature's harmony which Clare captures in the phrase 'nature's hum' (1). The serenity of the scene is expressed through the sounds and rhythms of nature's sultry bloom (2). The 'green wood fly & blossom haunting bee' (5) conveys 'the full nature of what stands forth...in a process of self-making.'<sup>7</sup> Words and things come together to form thing-words. 'In [the moments of writing] poetry, the artificiality of broken parts is reunited: there the fullness of the word—its rich contextual history, its organic power to become, to change—is reinstated.'<sup>8</sup> 'The inherent barriers erected against instrumental language are removed; the sides of the words come down so that the life of each word can converge with and overflow

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 103. Poem dated 1820's.

<sup>5</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar, Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.1, eds. Eric Robinson David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 3-25 (75-83). Hereafter, Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar*.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Chilcott, 'A Real World & Doubting Mind': *A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull UP, 1985) 39. Hereafter, 'A Real World.'

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, 'The Thing', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 168.

<sup>8</sup> Veronica O'Brien, 'The Language of Poetry', *An Irish Quarterly Review* 58 (1969): 415-26 (418). *JSTOR*. 1 Oct. 2011.

with other words drawing on both energies'<sup>9</sup> to move closer to the ideal of pure saying. Clare's diction again does not feel forced. Nor is there a feeling of having to make an effort to be effortless. Clare's words flow into what exists, the noiselessness of nothing calling the words to dwell into a 'here is' and 'a there.' 'June' is exploring that dynamism of thought where language does not fall into a specific category of instrumental or poetic language. Rather, it allows for a more lucid and deeper presence to appear as 'a cohering of words into a single thing.'<sup>10</sup> In other words, Clare's diction unveils the splendour of the overflowing presence in the sensible world:

Round field hedge now flowers in full glory twine  
 Large bindweed bells wild hop & streakd woodbine  
 That lift athirst their slender throated flowers  
 Agape for dew falls & for honey showers  
 These round each bush in sweet disorder run  
 & spread their wild hues to the sultry sun  
 Were its silk netting lace on twigs & leaves  
 The mottld spider at eves leisure weaves

(7-14)

...

Bright carlock bluecap & corn poppy red  
 Which in such clouds of colors wid[e]ly spread  
 That at the sun rise might to fancys eye  
 Seem to reflect the many colord sky

(19-22)

This poem discloses the full force of an awakening summer season. Clare presents a scene full of distinct entities which, although independent, are ontically anchored. Clare does not have a vision for nature. Nor does he reveal the presence of a hermeneutic prescribed or otherwise. 'June' is not a poem that summons discussions about 'truth', whether it is a 'truth' or 'the truth' and its whereabouts in language. The poem is not concerned with such things

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 418.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 426.

because it is attached to the essence of ‘truth’ which is the ‘truth’ of Being. Its self-expressive ‘compositions often seem to represent attempts to conjure up the spirit of plant and animal life...through an arrangement of materials...’<sup>11</sup> that lay claim only to its own active presence. The shorn sheep (94) that roam amongst the ‘shining pansys trimd in golden lace’ (112) and the ‘white & purple jiliflowers that stay / Lingerin in blossom summer half away’ (117-18) are examples of the poem’s semantic reticence. The section does not flout its poetic construction. Instead, the poem showcases its ability to ‘not be’ the consequence of an active purpose. The poem presents itself as a text whose beauty and Being exists because it has come into existence from the performance of cultivation rather than creation.

The primary images within Clare’s scenes allow themselves to be perceived as a ‘work-being.’ Such a strange neologism evidently belongs to Heidegger when he uses it to speak about works of art. Heidegger discusses the concept of ‘the reality of the work’ coming into its own. ‘Where does the work belong?’ Heidegger asks. ‘The work belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm opened up by itself. For the work-being of the work is present in, and only in, such opening up.’<sup>12</sup> This idea accurately conveys what is being consummated within the poem. Nature is not being intruded upon because it does not open up a place to accommodate the idea of accommodation. ‘The hay time butterflyes [that] dance up & down’ (30), the ‘ring dove brooding oer its idle nest’ (52) and the ‘deep ....sunsets crimson pillowd skyes’ (132) all mark a dialogue that speaks about a ‘letting go’ of the ground ....[and] floating free untethered.<sup>13</sup> The transparency of the diction would like to refine itself against the cross-purposed and reprobate nature of instrumental language. Indeed, the poem holds open the possibility of thinking about or re-thinking an experience with language. There is no such thing as a pure or more expressive language, and Ludwig Wittgenstein has thoroughly

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2008) 43- 44.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘The Origins of the Work of Art’ *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 15-88 (41). Hereafter, Heidegger, ‘OWA.’

<sup>13</sup> Bruns, *Heidegger’s Estrangements*, 59.

exposed the inconceivability of a private language.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Heidegger would say in his approach to poetry that ‘the poem is not anything to be approached. It is not anything objective. It is a speaking, and one does not approach speaking, rather one is pulled up short and one listens, as if to a pure speaking in which nothing is expressed.’<sup>15</sup> The images in ‘June’ that express their ontic presence come into the presence of Being from a language that presents the continuous presence of nature. It is as if poetry and the word were interruptions to the pure essences that are being allowed to be pure essences and intoxicate Clare’s visual pictures. Nothing is expressed; they simply show themselves.

Although ‘June’ anticipates Heidegger’s conceptual frameworks for poetry, poetic language and thinking, there is no room for or question of ideological appropriation here. The poem presents and holds its own truth and host its own ontological consciousness in diction that proves recalcitrant to ideology. The language of ‘June’ unconceals the inwardness of its subject rather than emphasising the externalness of the object.

The kinetic elements internalised in Clare’s picturesque landscapes become impotent in ‘July.’<sup>16</sup> The regions within the previous poems in which transference of the idea of *the Clearing* to a space where something can occur and for Being to show itself is not an event in ‘July.’ Long for the sake of being long, in an attempt to perhaps to gesture to the eighteenth century poets Clare occasionally liked to emulate such as Pope, the poem does not want to show a preference for or a recognition of something which can function as a central point. In a narrative style that would not be antagonistic to prose, ‘July’ wanders in a wilderness devoid of the invigoration of an ontological spirit and belies the new relevance of a July

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<sup>14</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, ed. Saul A. Kripke (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Bruns, *Heidegger’s Estrangements*, 64.

<sup>16</sup> In John Clare, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), there are two versions of ‘July.’ The original poem Clare sent to Taylor and the shorter version (‘July’ 2, (109-116) which appeared in publication after Taylor’s editing. The original and longer version is being consulted and referenced in this chapter in order to experience Clare’s intentions (84-108). It becomes clear however as to why Taylor reduced this poem so dramatically. It rambles and is profuse in detail without giving consideration to the exigencies of definition and authoritative concretion.

month with its 'sultry days & dewy nights' (2). It links a collection of sketches in the hope of unity and admits more detail than purpose in which to present the coherent happening of 'is.' From the hay makers (11), the farmers (16), to the shepherd (104), Clare abandons his usual treatment of a subject as an individual organism and maintains a continually expanding vision. This poem seems to have proceeded from Clare's inclination, instinct and craft; 'July' simply is not composed from the substance of 'now.' The introduction of the shepherd character after 'dob' (95) has been 'caught again' (98) and is 'to a tree at tether tyd' (99), to ensure that the boys who 'Sit at their dinner on the grass' (90) can eat without the nuisance of flies (84), provides an illustration of Clare using the material he had to hand and not his characteristic spontaneity:<sup>17</sup>

Soon as the morning wakens red  
 The shepherd startled from his bed  
 & rocks afield his morning pace  
 While folded sheep will know his face

(220-23)

Characteristically, Clare writes poetry that is centred on his visual awareness. In 'July' his awareness is not immediately given by what the scenes give. His awareness, in this instance, stems from his awareness as a poet and his rural life lived as a labourer.

Other examples exist in 'July' when the *is-ness* of these sentences fail to self-perpetuate the 'authoritative fullness'<sup>18</sup> of a self-exerting poetic intuition follow:

The yellow hammer builds its nest  
 By banks were sun beams earliest rest  
 That dries the dews from off the grass  
 Shading it from all that pass

<sup>17</sup> Edward Storey, *A Right to Song* (London: Methuen, 1982) 192.

<sup>18</sup> Chilcott, *A Real World*, 32.

(367-70)

What also contributes to this poem's out of 'placeness' is the texture of the poem which leads to a hybrid style. 'July' seems to be an anomaly against the previous poems that embody the rhapsody of nature in the form of letting the work be a work or, in the German, *das Werk ein Werk sein lassen*. In this poem, the way Clare relies on his ear to create a sense of regularity through metrical construction makes the eruption of Being intermittent and not a constant movement of presence. 'July' does not 'erupt within what is'<sup>19</sup> in order to disclose the truth that is in the work. Even scenes that present Clare watching and writing exhibit representations of the spirit of nature displacing nature itself:

Rude patterns of the thistle flower  
Unbrinkd & open to the shower  
& honest faces frank & free  
That breath of mountain liberty

...

(215-18)<sup>20</sup>

The young qui[c]ks branches seem as dead  
& scorch from yellow into red  
Ere autum hath its pencil taen  
Their shades in different hues to stain

(317-20)

Two systems are present here. One involves the engendering of what lies outside of Being's generative force. The other decreases the communication of Being's language in a work of art as it speaks of its 'thing-being.'<sup>21</sup> The 'Rude patterns of the thistle flower' and the 'honest faces' have their origins in moments when the poem's status of pure ontology has been

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<sup>19</sup> Bruns, *Heidegger's Estrangements*, 49.

<sup>20</sup> The discussion of this passage can be found in John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton, 'John Clare the Trespasser', *John Clare in Context*, eds. Geoffrey Summerfield, Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 87-129.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, 'OWA', 30.



interrupted. The poem has allowed the assembling of characteristics which gather outside the work of art to filter through the thing in its *thingness*.<sup>22</sup> The poem has ‘let itself be said’<sup>23</sup> by what it receives outside of its *thingly* character. Such processes encroach upon the ‘what-is’, lessening the impact of what is ‘mere.’ The following sentences that speak of autumn stem from Clare’s foreknowledge and how this in turn brings expectations rather than *here-ness* and what can be found in the essences of things. Whilst there are no internal tensions between the two systems, the efficacy of to use Heidegger’s parlance, ‘the thingness of the thing’<sup>24</sup> is compromised and the communication of the ‘self-contained independence’ of Being becomes irregular as opposed to being fully mobilised.

And yet there are clear moments when the poem echoes the excessive disclosure of ontology, or, *Gelassenheit*, moments which ‘stay within the truth of what is happening in the work.’<sup>25</sup> The following sentences portray such an occurrence:

Noon gathers with its blistering breath  
 Around & day dyes still as death  
 The breeze is stopt the lazy bough  
 Hath not a leaf that dances now  
 The totter grass upon the hill  
 & spiders threads is hanging still  
 The feathers dropt from morehens wings  
 Upon the waters surface clings  
 As steadfast & as heavy seem  
 As stones beneath them in the stream

(287-96)

Clare’s lines display an artistry that comes from itself, rests upon itself and is about itself. The sentences energise Heidegger’s questions of ‘What happens here? What is at work in the

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<sup>22</sup> Paraphrased from Heidegger, ‘OWA’, 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

work?’<sup>26</sup> Clare’s aesthetic images respond to Heidegger’s questions in their unconscious revelation of the truth of ‘is.’ As Heidegger argues, ‘art is truth setting itself to work....’<sup>27</sup>

In the month of ‘August’<sup>28</sup>, the prevailing effect is a different impulse in Clare’s presentation of his phenomenal world. His usual ‘mimetic accuracy is temporarily infiltrated’<sup>29</sup> by a stylistic texture that has little sense of immediacy and at times employs a mode of otherness in which to showcase images of the harvest month. This otherness stems from the un-exclusive reality Clare ‘creates’ in a bid to maintain the animation of diversity. He speaks out from characters’ minds, using a knowledge that pre-exists the poem (176-79) and watches their actions while making assumptions about their intentions (55-58). The narrative within the poem that acquaints us with ‘the ruddy child nursed in the lap of care’ (21-68) provides an illustration. Clare writes this episode through a mixture of perception, foreknowledge and reckoning: he describes the child busying itself with wheat (25-26) and insects (30), being wounded by the ‘piercing stubbs’ (50) and being comforted by his mother who, Clare assures us, will be being given ‘well earned pence’ (56) to buy ‘Sweet candied horehound cakes & pepper mint’ (58). ‘The thing is not...in its self-containment.’<sup>30</sup> ‘....There is not so much an assault upon the thing as rather an inordinate attempt to bring it into the greatest possible proximity to us.’<sup>31</sup> Clare effectuates this arrangement through his narrative outline. This narrative supports the poem’s progression through its effective management of its continually alternating but connected scenes. Primarily, ‘August’ functions as a declaration of action first, and then the event of things coming into presence. How this is employed can be seen in a number of instances where Clare uses the strategy of saying, detailing and advancing. Two examples serve as illustrations. At the beginning of the poem

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<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, ‘OWA’, 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, 118-28.

<sup>29</sup> Chilcott, ‘A Real World’, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, ‘OWA’, 26.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

Clare uses a statement to convey the approach of harvest and 'its busy day' (1). After this action, nothing comes into presence despite the description of the crops on the landscape (2-4). The village is silent (5-14) until Clare awakens it with two sentences:

The fields now claim them where a motley crew  
Of old & young their daily tasks pursue  
(15-16)

From the thrust of these sentences, the ontic and events of the ontic coming into presence are enthusiastic and irrepressible. Similarly, the line 'The reapers oer their glittering sickles stoop' (71) is promptly followed by how the reapers' presence 'oft startles the partridge and the mice' (72-79). The inactive stooping of the reapers is the impetus for the partridges to 'covey up' and the 'mice from terrors dangers nimbly run' (76). The reapers' stooping also brings the animals onto the scene but what they also bring is a likeness from the actuality of the thing. The animals only lend likeness on account of the lack of an immediate reality from Clare. The poet has observed these scenes many times before. Henceforth, the poetry gives us 'the reproduction of the thing's general essence' and not, as Wallace Stevens says, 'the thing itself.' These images suggest the problems inherent in any poetic description of nature. The scenes and their ontological presencing cannot exist in the successive order that is imposed by Clare's poetic ordering. The problem of simultaneity must occur, as Clare sees objects and people at the same time. However, what is present and available, that is to say, what stands free from instinct and representational thinking constitutes one of the most distinctive features of *Gelassenheit* poetry. The poem expresses a self-determining thinking that translates into 'meditative thinking', which thinks the truth of Being that belongs to Being and listens to it. This is illustrated when Clare observes:

Pears plumbs or filberts covered oer in leams  
 While the pale moon creeps high in peaceful dreams  
 & oer his harvest theft in jealous light  
 Fills empty shadows with the power to fright  
 & owlet screaming as it bounces nigh  
 That from some barn hole pops & hurries bye  
 He hears the noise & trembling to escape  
 While every object grows a dismal shape

(125-31)

...

Where soon as ere the morning opes its eyes  
 The restless hogs will happen on the prize  
 & crump adown the mellow & the green  
 & makes all seem as nothing neer had been  
 Amid the broils of harvests weary reign  
 How sweet the Sabbath wakes its rat again  
 & on each weary mind what rapture dwells  
 To hear once more its pleasant chiming bells

(137-44)

The diction is locked into its own characterisation of what Heidegger terms ‘the thing *qua* thing.’<sup>32</sup> The sensual heaviness of the images that portray the slumber of a day trying to be integrated in the new morning, presents the paradoxical emptiness of the words. Ripe like the ‘pears plumbs’ (125) with pictures of ‘the pale moon’ (126) that soon gives way to pleasant chiming bells (144) during the harvest season (141) and the peace of beautiful nature, Clare’s diction is estranged from what lies beyond it, for it is concerned to convey its own world. There is no evidence or aftermath of experience. This poem denotes real objects in a context that that does not expose other conscious layers of meaning since the truth of the thing is not overtaken. What is also elsewhere is anything which can be termed as pre-conceived. The words in their undisturbed state of emptiness, unconceal to speak like Heidegger, what is already present. They suspend consciousness as they sleep in existence itself and not structures of existence. As the scenes reveal their empty spaces in which anything which is

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<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, ‘The Thing’, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 165-86 (169).

made cannot be sustained, it is not just the restless hogs but the creative nothingness of the diction steeped in self-absorption that will make all seem as ‘nothing neer had been’ (140).

‘August’, with its focus on the overlapping of harvest activities through its own social identity, is a poem that moves closer to Heidegger’s idea of *Ereignis*<sup>33</sup>, the event of createdness. In this event, the work announces its self-creation, and ‘[T]he more essentially this thrust comes into *the Open*, the stronger and more solitary the work becomes.’<sup>34</sup> ‘August’ like some of the other poems from *The Shepherd’s Calendar* is a poetic embodiment both of *The Shepherd’s Calendar*’s individual resistance to critical reconstructions and Heidegger’s idea in ‘The Origins of the Work of Art.’ *The Shepherd’s Calendar* ‘is given over to the *createdness* of the work, where createdness....is less a condition of the work as a product of the artist’s hand, than it is the condition of the work’s earthliness—a condition which is not subject to or brought about by the artist but is prior to all handiwork and which craftsmanship or *poiēsis* presupposes.’<sup>35</sup> *The Shepherd’s Calendar* has shown itself to be the art of ‘the letting happen of the truth of what is.’<sup>36</sup> During these occasions when the poems open themselves up to the eventful fact [Ereignishafte] of the poems being as ‘this’, they essentially illuminate their presencing and emerge as poems that preserve otherness. Clare’s *The Shepherd’s Calendar* ‘mean’ their own uniqueness as they create their own events.

Heidegger’s helps us differentiate the ways in which Clare and Hölderlin present the facticity of Being<sup>37</sup> within the poetic text. Hölderlin presents a large poetic discourse on Being that is linked to the being-with of the gods,<sup>38</sup> whilst Clare, through the medium of

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<sup>33</sup> See *Glossary*.

<sup>34</sup> Heidegger, ‘OWA’, 66.

<sup>35</sup> Bruns, *Heidegger’s Estrangements*, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, ‘OWA’, 72.

<sup>37</sup> By this term Heidegger means the concrete fact of existence. The Facticity of Being can be interpreted as the *thrownness* (Geworfenheit) of individual existence or how *Dasein* is ‘thrown into the world.’

<sup>38</sup> Here is an example from Hölderlin that is demonstrative of his onto-theological existential poetics. The poem is entitled ‘When I was a boy...’, written between 1797-98 in Frankfurt. Quoted from Friedrich Hölderlin, *Selected Poems*, Trans. David Constantine (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1990) 13.

nature, presents Being as truth. But as both poets ‘speak’ poetic thinking, there are occasions in which Clare, the poet of the totality of scenes experienced, exhibit features in common with Hölderlin, the paragon of using the poetic word to determine a new time from the gods fleeing to their return. Hölderlin’s poem ‘Looking Out’ (1671)<sup>39</sup> and Clare’s poem ‘September’<sup>40</sup> crystallise shared characteristics.

Clare again falls upon the *aa/bb* rhyme to relate the tenor of complete synthesis between poetic ontology and rural activity. Subsequently, the poem produces very little that can be ideologically deconstructed. ‘September’ is not promoting its ‘poetic lack’; it is showcasing its freedom to be a poem; it does not deter the encroachment of interpretative translations, but it does not encourage their categorical approaches. ‘The butterflye enjoys his

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When I was a boy  
 A god would often save me  
 From the scolding and switches of men,  
 And I would play safely and beautifully  
 With the flowers of the grove,  
 And heaven's soft breezes  
 Played with me.  
 And as you delight  
 The hearts of the flowers  
 When they extend  
 Their tender arms to you  
 You delighted my heart,  
 Father Helios! and, like Endymion,  
 I was your favourite,  
 Holy Luna!  
 O all you faithful  
 Friendly gods!  
 If only you knew  
 How my soul loved you!  
 Then I did not call you  
 By your names, and you  
 Did not call me as men do,  
 As if they knew each other.  
 But I knew you better  
 Than I've ever known mankind,  
 I understood the silence of the sky,  
 But never men's words.  
 I was raised by the melody  
 Of the murmuring grove  
 And to love I learned  
 Among flowers.

<sup>39</sup> James Mitchell, *Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin: The Fire of the Gods Drives Us to Set Forth by Day and by Night Poems and Fragments*, trans. James Mitchell (San Francisco: Ithuriel’s Spear, a project of Intersection, 2004) 53.

<sup>40</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, 129-36.

hour / & Flirts unhaced from flower to flower / & humming bees that morning calls / From out the low huts mortar walls' (15-18) are lines that make appear the sensuous existence of poetry. But they also elude appropriation. The poem to which they belong has no roots in the 'setting up of the world that we find already at hand.'<sup>41</sup> The lines have no pragmatic function. From their inherent properties of pleasure, and gratification, they show their attunement with what is actual and alone. There is no subtext signified; as the butterfly flies and the bees fly out from the mortar walls to a new morning, they flaunt their material freedom. They also enjoy the freedom of being a bee and a butterfly in and of themselves without reference to the human act of representation and representing them.

'September' feels barren in its content and quiet as it moves from the near culmination of the harvest, to focus on the speaker's life and what he will be when the harvest eventually ends. The voice, pathetic in tone, speaks of singing a much loved lay amidst scenes they 'feign to dwell' (167). The speaker points out that singing the lay is in vain because although it is related to harvest time, singing it cannot recreate harvest time conditions. The joys to be had during harvest time are gone and will only be returned according to the movement of the calendar:

When under sheltering shocks—a crowd  
Of merry voices mingle loud  
Wearing the short lived boon along  
With vulgar tale & merry song  
Draining with leisures laughing eye

(113-17)

The lay's melancholy strains are in contrast with the mood Clare uses to mark another day during the harvest: 'The harvest awakes the morning still' (1) is calm, passive and antithetical to the usual lively diction Clare characteristically is known to use to document a new

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<sup>41</sup> Bruns, Heidegger's *Estrangements*, 44.

morning. Nevertheless, his reader is not left disappointed as the section containing sentences 1-52 and the scene punctuates the atmosphere with noise and activity:

Loud are the mornings early sounds  
That farm & cottage yard surrounds

...

(29-30)

The low of cows & bark of dogs  
&cackling hens & wineing hogs  
Swell high—while at the noise awoke

...

(35- 37)

From nights dull prison comes the duck  
Waddling eager thro the muck

...

(47-48)

& beside the stable wall  
Where morns sunbeams earliest fall  
Basking hens in playfull rout  
Flap the smoking dust about

(71-74)

Clare then presents the celebration of the end of the harvest by the locals but ‘the darkest glooms abide’ (154). The equanimity that the harvest engendered has come to an end. The resources of nature that is able to keep at bay the darkness that can overshadow existence re-surface, and Clare can see clearly the prickly thorns of reality:

Thus harvest ends his busy reign  
& leaves the fields their peace again  
Where autumns shadows idly muse  
& tinge the trees with many hues  
Amis the scenes I’m feign to dwell  
& sing of what I love so well  
But hollow winds & tumbling floods  
& humming shows & moaning woods



All startle into sudden strife  
& wake a mighty lay to life  
Making amid their strains divine  
All songs in vain so mean as mine

(163-74)

Hölderlin also shows his awareness of nature as a therapeutic tool that is able to temporarily banish existential concerns in 'Looking Outward'<sup>42</sup>:

The day is bright with pictures for everyone,  
when green fields appear on the distant plain,  
before the light of evening yields to twilight,  
and reflections of light alleviate the noise of the day.  
The inner being of the world often appears clouded  
and hidden, and people's minds are full of doubts  
and irritation, but splendid nature cheers up their days,  
and doubt's dark questions stay distant.

Hölderlin is championing how nature's unconscious naturalness is able to influence and transform human psychologies. It leaves them with the sense that the dark mysteries in life can be made less of an affliction due to nature's intrinsic power to calm. Both poems present their states of 'is' and their *is-ness* like dragonflies landing on an object; the act takes place but from the site of their ontological terrain they dislodge the construction of formal interpretations by offering nothing in the act which could be used to assemble and sustain a pragmatic and critical interpretation. 'September' and the rest of *The Shepherd's Calendar* asks to be interpreted through the unconcealedness of its *ownmost* truth. In light of this statement, it becomes possible to claim both that Clare is a poet of Being according to Heidegger's thinking and a poet who lets happen Being in the midst of his poems on his own terms.

To understand how Clare's poetry is able to move from a convention of visual description to a discourse of Being and *Gelassenheit* is to highlight the lucent correlatives

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<sup>42</sup> Hölderlin, *Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin*, 53.

that ‘October’ so readily imparts. ‘October’<sup>43</sup> is a poem that identifies with Heidegger’s idea of the ‘estranged’ that is, a text that is allowed to be a text, or, in other words, letting the work be a work. His thought is based on the idea of restraint and staying within the truth that occurs within the work, namely *essential* poetry. Otherness is what he upholds as the truth of the work, otherness that comes not phenomenologically, but through the text becoming ‘still’ enough to perceive Being. Heidegger writes ‘Truth is never gathered from objects that are present and ordinary.’<sup>44</sup> The occurrence of truth always means estrangement from what is merely present and familiar. Inside Heidegger’s thought is not an allusion to any doctrine of emancipation from convention or habituated response. Heidegger’s thinking leads elsewhere. Bruns’ explicatory account is more than sufficient:

The work of estrangement occurs when the work comes so radically into its own that it does not become possible to re-experience the familiar with a new innocence or a new awakening (like defamiliarization according to the Structuralists or the Formalists) of the senses or with the sort of enlightened consciousness that is made possible by the breaking-down of conventions and the overturning of tradition.<sup>45</sup>

Estrangement in poetry lets happen what Being wants to happen to itself when it is the essence of the text. It is left alone to infuse into the words, the content and the poem’s aesthetic temperament. Through Being’s ontological ordering, the nature of the thing and in the case of Clare, the nature of the thing in nature, is given the space to express ‘Being’s expressings.’<sup>46</sup> ‘October’ is ‘not the reproduction of some particular entity that happens to be present at any given time; it is, on the contrary, truth in the realm of *the Clearing*. This confers upon Clare’s diction a “greater freedom”<sup>47</sup> in which to bring forth his visual

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<sup>43</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, 137- 43.

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, ‘OWA’, 71.

<sup>45</sup> Bruns, *Heidegger’s Estrangements*, 44-45.

<sup>46</sup> Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1954) 424.

<sup>47</sup> Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 139.

phenomena which could otherwise have been hindered by language's lack of visualisability.<sup>48</sup>

Clare's visual pictures are artistic texts that draw out the uniqueness of Being from amongst the presence of con/figurations of nature in what Alexander King describes as the 'dull affair' of 'soundless, scentless, colourless'<sup>49</sup> poetic artistry, indifferent and impersonal. Clare's poems reflect what Heidegger refers to in 'What is Metaphysics?'<sup>50</sup> as the 'Nothing' [*vom Nichts*]. The Nothing repels what has the potential to submerge the poetry in superficial universalisms and symbolic value. *The Shepherd's Calendar* levitates beyond descriptive accuracy and estranges itself to the point that it emancipates the heightened awareness of 'natural things in their purest immediacy.'<sup>51</sup> The independent presence of the worlds within its poetry shows Being coming into an *openness*:

Like to a painted map the landscape lies  
& wild above shine the cloud thronged skies  
The flying clouds urged on in swiftest pace  
Like living things as if they runned a race  
The winds that oer each coming tempest broods  
Waking like spirits in their startling moods  
Fluttering the sear leaves on the blackning lea  
That litters under every fading tree  
& pausing oft as falls the patting rain  
Then gathering strength & twirling them again  
Till drops the sudden calm—the hurried mill  
Is stopt at once & every noise is still

(89-100)

The poetic consciousness of the lines is rooted in the language of poetic ontology. Clare's scene appears to be conveying the effects of atmospheric pressure and how the wind causes the involuntary animation of everything in its wake. The clouds do not float but fly (91), the sear leaves flutter until the wind's potency is weakened by 'the patting rain' (97) but then

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

<sup>49</sup> Alexander King, *Wordsworth and the Artist's Vision: An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Athlone Press, 1966) 7.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?' *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964)* 97.

<sup>51</sup> Chilcott, 'A Real World', 223.

‘gathers strength’ (98) once more to twirl the foliage again. But the subject of these lines shows more than climatic disturbances. Clare’s poetic language is demonstrating the interfusion of form and phenomena and how the phenomena are at liberty to be in and of themselves. The rhymes enhance the sense of freedom Clare evokes through the unhindered wind. They do not draw attention to themselves. The pentameters sway and flow in a crispness that reflects the freedom of the blowing wind. Like the wind, Clare’s lines are not allocated a purpose, nor do they bear the burden of his poetic imagination as we have seen in other poems such as ‘July.’ The sky does not hold metonyms; it is ‘thronged with clouds’ (90). The lines privilege their existence *qua* existence rather than carrying rhetorical devices that serve to embellish what is already there. From literary and artistic frameworks Clare, , in a way that anticipates Heidegger’s ontological exposition, transfers the thingly character back to the thing. ‘October’ is not a poem about the processes that exist between the mind and what it is able to represent, and yet, it in its inclination to be and maintain its own reality, the poem highlights the ontological function of language. There is not a moment when the lines show an alienation from Being. The noise of otherness which attempts to make the poem’s *thingly-ness* inauthentic ‘Is stopt at once & every noise is still’ (100). Away from all else, ‘October’ is only disturbed by the wind.

The most distinctive character of Clare’s poetry is its exemplification of the ordinary. Clare elevates the artistic level of ordinariness allowing it to assume a more central significance. The poet carries this through by evoking, not realism, but the total experience of reality. Shunning all other agencies, the poetry then can be ‘still.’ Heidegger’s obscure expression does not say what is really meant when he uses the term ‘stillness’ but what is palpable is that stillness does not signify the staying in place of things. This role seems more suited to language when it is calling world and thing into what Heidegger refers to as

‘ownmost tendency of Being.’<sup>52</sup> The still life within *The Shepherd’s Calendar* does not work through an exact simulation of Heidegger’s idea, however. What is being otherwise suggested is an event that occurs within the poems whereby language communicates, but there is a pause between itself and the objects in language. In other words, language becomes bracketed; what we are given, as a gift, is the pure epistemology of poems that only know themselves from within their own boundaries. To exemplify how Heidegger’s concept of ‘stillness’ can be evidenced in *The Shepherd’s Calendar* another comparison to Wallace Stevens is warranted. Stevens’ poem ‘Of Mere Being’ (1954)<sup>53</sup> is a precise and literary enactment of poetry not unveiling any meaning of Being but instead demonstrating how its language reveals things in their being:

The palm at the end of the mind,  
Beyond the last thought, rises  
In the bronze décor,

A gold-feathered bird  
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,  
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason  
That makes us happy or unhappy.  
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.  
The palm stands on the edge of space.  
The wind moves slowly in the branches.  
The bird’s fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

Stevens draws our attention to the things as things and the romantic idea of discovery. It seems almost futile to attempt a criticism of the poem or to use established terms or categories in which to discuss ‘Of Mere Being.’ It responds readily to Fry’s theory of ostention and also allows for a phenomenological discussion because of Stevens’ use of the

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<sup>52</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2008). Trans. of *Sein und Zeit*. 1927, 352:305.

<sup>53</sup> Wallace Stevens, *Wallace Stevens: Poems Selected by John Burnside* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008) 129.

structures of subjective experience and consciousness. The first stanza performs as a metaphor in that it is revealing how the mind it is emptying itself to see things anew. Indeed, ‘A gold-feathered bird / Sings in the palm, without meaning’ (4-5). The presence of silence is ascertained by the silence invoked before the poem begins and while the first stanza is being conveyed. In the silence the abstract images only give of themselves and throughout the poem the ‘it’ is not or cannot be known.

The *thinging* totality of Being’s presence channelling through the phenomenological ‘is-ness’ of objects occurs and recurs in *The Shepherd’s Calendar*.

The poem ‘November’<sup>54</sup> focuses on objects that can be stillness in reality or stillness as art:

Dull for a time the slumbering weather flings  
 Its murky prison round then winds wake loud  
 Wi sudden start the once still forest sings  
 Winters returning song cloud races cloud  
 & the orison throws away its shroud  
 & sweeps its stretching circle from the eye  
 Storm upon storm in quick succession crowd  
 & oer the sameness of the purple skye  
 Heaven paints its wild irregularity

(73-81)

Although Clare’s imagery bears the characteristics of the temperamental weather in a November month, it is as if he had been asked to use poetry to make manifest, the imagery of a landscape painting from a Turner or a Gainsborough painting. As ‘Heaven paints its wild irregularity’ (81) Clare’s artistry is depicted. The synaesthesia of the sentences removes the reader from the ‘superfluous embellishment[s]’<sup>55</sup> of rhetorical devices but brings them closer to the essence of poetic words in their stillness. Given the crisp observation and clear

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<sup>54</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, 144-55.

<sup>55</sup> Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*, 141.

perception in *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) Clare's lines from November convey the impression of the knowledge of reality. 'The total effect is as if words as words withdrew themselves from the focus of our attention and we were directly aware of an issue of feelings and perceptions.'<sup>56</sup>

The ontology of stillness provides space for the truth of the work to be set apart from the nature of the creative process. What results is that, according to Heidegger, 'the workly character of the work'<sup>57</sup> shines through.

William Carlos Williams' iconic poem 'The Red Wheelbarrow' (1923) contains the same ontical /ontological properties that help to articulate 'November.' Important for its emphasis on reality as an activity, the poem's intimacy with the potency of cognitive depictions is blurred by Williams, and in turn, produces an aesthetic effect that appropriates the essence of 'things and not ideas' as Wallace Stevens would have it. Williams dissects the image of the wheelbarrow down to the image of its most basic parts. The objects are still, the barrow is 'beside' the chickens but stationary whilst the chickens are likely to be moving about. Presenting one central idea on the back of hard working nouns, Williams compresses these small images to point to what lies in their midst: the coming into being of a discourse that says of beings no more than they are:

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

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<sup>56</sup> F.R. Leavis, 'Imagery and Movement: Notes in the Analysis of Poetry', *Scrutiny*, 1945, 124. Quoted by Terry Eagleton in *How to Read a Poem*, 140.

<sup>57</sup> Heidegger, 'OWA', 58.

beside the white  
chickens.<sup>58</sup>

However, there is an emphasis on dependence. What the images are dependent on is the visual perception and interpretation of the poem as an art object. Yet the poem manages to undermine and de-stabilise what it invites. It invites interpretation but its consciousness, rooted in its character of *thinging*, undoes any imposition placed upon it and maintains its firm and eternal grasp on its indelible shape.

During the month of 'November', the village that has seen and experienced much activity and change has reached a lull. Even though 'November' appears to have different temporal modes swirling around its stanzas, this impression is a false one. Stillness calls the thing and its ebbing world into the occasion of something happening without movement being involved. The lines from 136 to 144, are symptomatic of the impassive atmosphere Clare casts over his village scenes:

Thus wears the month along in checkerd moods  
Sunshine & shadow tempests loud & calms  
One hour dyes silent oer the sleepy woods  
The next wakes loud with unexpected storms  
A dreary nakedness the field deforms  
Yet many rural sounds & rural sights  
Live in the village still about the farms  
Where toils rude uproar hums from morn till night  
Noises in which the ear of industry delights

Two notions of stillness coalesce here: a stillness that naturally occurs due to the changing of seasons and the stillness of ontology laid bare. The stillness that rises from the silence of the sleepy woods, (138) that casts a 'deforming' (140) dreary nakedness across the field, is punctuated by the usual delightful noises of industry (144) and is signalling the onset of

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<sup>58</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (London: Penguin, 1976) 57.



winter. The de-vitalised language in the poem is being overwhelmed by Being's ontological presence. 'November' makes insignificant the utterances of instrumental language but makes objects appear in the moment of the pause between language and its gesturing to signification. Estranged in its ostensive moment the poem comes into the 'now.' Even the characters (the shepherd (82), the hedger (37), the cleanly maiden (28) and the ploughman (118) are subdued. They contribute very little to the natural landscape and instead, they become part of it.

In his lectures entitled 'The Nature of Language'<sup>59</sup> (which does not see him making any progress or rethinking his previously established positions dealing with the issue of language users 'on their way to language'<sup>60</sup>) Heidegger clarifies his hermeneutic position. For Heidegger, there is no poetry that exists for its own sake; poetry is always in response to the matter of thinking that is, before the poem is approached and after it has been thought about and left behind. And yet, the grandness of his onto-poetical reflections always manages to be relevant in some way to poetry; and in some way to Clare.

The ultimate poem of Clare's calendar bears all the hallmarks of a poem that does not incite meditative thinking about Being. If it does, it provides a trajectory toward thinking that is not associated with *Denken*. 'December',<sup>61</sup> the culmination of narratives that present the turning world through the lens of Clare's Helpston village, looks ahead to Heidegger's symbiosis of ontology and poetry. Yet, its fluidity cannot be attributed to Heidegger's ontological thought. 'December' shows its independence from Heidegger as it conveys its

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<sup>59</sup> These lectures were delivered at Freiburg 1957-58 and were comprised of three lectures whose aim was firstly to undergo an experience with language and secondly to reconnect language with those who speak it together with posing and answering the question of how nature and language belong together. Heidegger felt that language had become 'other' than the word to language users by virtue of numerous analytical philosophies of language, grammatical and semantic studies and language games which had the effect of alienating language from mortals. See Martin Heidegger, 'The Nature of Language', 57-108. Originally published by Verlag Günther Neske, Pfullingen, under the title *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, by Verlag Günther Neske, 1959.

<sup>60</sup> Paraphrased from Heidegger, 'On the Way to Language' (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1972). Originally Published by Verlag Günther Neske under the title *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 1959.

<sup>61</sup> Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, 156-62.

experience of Being. ‘December’ cannot boast of the immediacy of Being; forces overwhelm the ‘mere’ fact of its being. After the celebration of the seasons and the expressiveness of the harvest months the calendar ends in the topos of Christmas. Even though the poem has a firm grasp on the traits of the yuletide month, rural life, the bounteous gratification of nature, and Clare’s idea of the village at Christmas preside:

As tho the homestead trees were drest  
 In lieu of snow wi dancing leaves  
 As tho the sun dryd martins nest  
 Instead of icles hung the eaves  
 The children hail the happy day  
 As if the snow was april grass  
 & pleasd as neath the warmth of may  
 Sport oer the water froze to glass

(105-12)

‘December’ does not disclose freedom; it is a poem of reference and referents. Its *this-ness* does not thing presence and, at the same time, the appearance of pure Being and its essences that have infused the other months is made contingent and vulnerable:

Old customs O I love the sound  
 However simple they may be  
 What ere wi time has sanction found  
 Is welcome & is dear to me  
 Pride grows above simplicity  
 & spurns it from her haughty mind  
 & soon the poets song will be  
 The only refuge they can find

(41-48)

Running over octaves, the alternating rhyme scheme (*ab /ab*) that Clare chooses once more, infuses the poem with a blithe personality. But the presence of the intrinsic humming sound of pre-construction declares a purpose for existence rather than existence itself. Its language is not inherently commensurate to refute traditional and representative energies. Its diction is sunk into its own conscious constructions and not there because *it is* there. Meaning too is produced which can be consumed. In its inoffensive celebration of Christmas and the end of another year of work, ‘December’ however, highlights a simplistic and yet crucial point

which highlights a lack within Heidegger's poetic thinking. For Heidegger, essential poetry speaks Being, brings its presence nearer and sends a call to humanity to think about what is to be experienced in language. But it is fair to say that Clare's final poem highlights how Heidegger misses 'The music of what happens'<sup>62</sup> in poetry. The philosopher is too preoccupied with aligning poetry and for the most part German poetry, with his reflections on culture, history and the task of grounding the founding of Being into the word as poetry. As a result, he overlooks other *essences* of poetry. Heidegger does not concern himself with poetry's creative energy to be the truth of feeling, its willingness to incite sentiment, be the vehicle for experiential remonstrations and provide aesthetic delectation. Therefore, he does not put himself in the position where he is able to offer a detailed critique of the qualities that make some poetry more 'valid' than others. What can be gleaned from Heidegger's literary criticism is that he focuses on the same motifs and metaphors such as 'home', 'light' and 'nature' to help him to categorise the authenticity of poetry as it unconceals and inaugurates the essence of things. *The Shepherd's Calendar* is certainly reflective of Heidegger's *essential* poetic tendencies but it also manages to add new illuminations to Heidegger's poetic ontology.

What the ontological essences in *The Shepherd's Calendar* reveal is a poet who is writing from the premise of the moment which gathers and makes apparent the explicitness of *this-ness*. Clare's writing poetry is not Hölderlinesque; his poetic oeuvre does not testify to a founding of Being and the grounding of our existence to the nearness of gods. Responsive and yet resistant to Heideggerean explanation, Clare shows his status as a poet whose poetic ontology incites the presence of Being to appear through his poetry and not through philosophical means to which poetry becomes an end. His poetry does not enmesh its natural

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<sup>62</sup> Helen Vendler, *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1993).

processes in paradigmatic or intellectual configurations. It evolves a sense of presentness as a 'thing-being',<sup>63</sup> allowing only its own impulses.

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<sup>63</sup> Heidegger, 'OWA', 31.

## Chapter Four

### **Clare's Descriptive Poetry: The Truth of Nature and the Truth of Human Being**

Key to this chapter is the relevance to Clare of Heidegger's initial and revised ideas, especially with regard to the etymological and ontological nuances Heidegger performs during his later hermeneutics with the word *aletheia*.

The change in Heidegger's thinking after *Being and Time* (1927) has been contentiously interpreted by some Heideggerian scholars such as William J. Richardson as a paradigmatic shift in the thinker's philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Heidegger's critics have discussed a 'turn' within his thought on more than one occasion. This earlier 'turn', which attends to the origins of truth, takes place before the indubitable change in ontological focus which sees the philosopher perform a 'turn' from fundamental ontology to being preoccupied at length with poetry, art and language. This idea of an early 'turn' is to be found in the etymological and ontological nuances Heidegger performs during his later hermeneutics with the word *aletheia*.

The distinctiveness of the term *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια)<sup>2</sup> emerges from Heidegger's mature thought. Initially, Heidegger interprets *aletheia* as 'truth', an interpretation which has metaphysical origins. Heidegger had earlier dismissed metaphysical approaches, due to their ignorance regarding the question of Being. Heidegger formulates his argument for a relationship between truth and Being and their ontological foundations in 'The Traditional Conception of Truth, and its Ontological Foundations' in Section I. 6 of *Being and Time* (1927). His idea of

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Richardson, ed. *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> *Aletheia* is a Greek term that takes the meaning of 'truth' or 'undisclosedness.' The term can also be translated as the state of not being hidden or factuality.

truth, here, is that of ‘taking entities out of their hiddenness and letting them be seen in their unhiddenness (their uncoveredness).’<sup>3</sup>

How things appear and the Being of truth prompted Heidegger to review his thought. Thus, the claim of an early ‘turn’ in Heidegger in relation to the interpretation of truth is affirmed by the philosopher’s own admission. He acknowledges that he had misjudged the philosophical implications of interpreting *aletheia* as ‘truth’ without exploring its ontological premises. He conceded that:

To raise the question of *aletheia*, of disclosure as such, is not the same as raising the question of truth. For this reason, it was inadequate and misleading to call *aletheia*, in the sense of opening, truth.<sup>4</sup>

He expanded his thinking on the question of *aletheia* in a series of lectures; most notably in a lecture which was eventually published as *Introduction to Metaphysics*.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, he provides an etymological analysis of *aletheia*. From his exegesis, he formulates a new and more nuanced understanding of the term as ‘unconcealedness.’ Some forty years after publishing *Being and Time*, Heidegger brought renewed attention to the concept of *aletheia*. He revisited the implications of the word regarding both his philosophical position and the question of Being. He extended his revision and understanding of the concept in the essay *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* (1935).<sup>6</sup> This essay highlights the particularities of *aletheia* in regards to disclosedness. He writes:

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2008). Trans. of *Sein und Zeit*. 1927, 262: 220.

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, Trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) 70. Trans. of *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Max Niemayer, 1969) 86.

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, ed and Trans. James Manheim. 4<sup>th</sup> (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 55-73.

*Aletheia*, disclosure thought of as *the Opening* of presence, is not yet truth. Is *aletheia* then less than truth? Or is it more because it first grants truth as *adequatio* and *certitudo*, because there can be no presence and presenting outside of the realm of *the Opening*?<sup>7</sup>

This re-defined word by Heidegger is mindful of and accommodates the way in which things appear as entities in the world and how we come to understand their *Seiendheit* or 'Beingness.'<sup>8</sup>

Heidegger's revised distinction of the word *aletheia* has a special relevance to Clare's relationship with nature and a large cross-section of his nature poems. It provides greater illumination on the ways in which Clare views nature and how Helpston's nature, and nature *qua* nature, does not simply inspire or enthrals, but how it discloses its *Beingness* to Clare.

The argument of this chapter will be twofold. First, it will contend that, Clare, distinguishing nature from ideas of reality and actuality<sup>9</sup>, is brought into a metaphysical experience with nature. Clare's perceptions of 'pure nature' can be explained using Heidegger's original interpretation of *aletheia* as truth. Secondly, it will show how, as he meditates upon the context of human Being, nature is able to inspire and prompt him to contemplate. Clare realises and comes to accept that his personal identity is bound up with what nature discloses as its Being. This can be understood according to Heidegger's revisions of *aletheia* as disclosedness. Clare's treatment of nature allows nature's Being to divulge to Clare its ontological 'truth' and subsequently reveal itself as 'an extension of his own Being.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 69. A note on the meaning of the 'Open. 'It is the work as a work in its presencing.' Please refer to *Glossary* for a more detailed explanation. Quoted from Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 15-88 (45). Hereafter, Heidegger, 'OWA.'

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger refers to all metaphysical determinations of the Being of beings as *Seiendheit* when he is exploring the question, 'What is the Beingness of beings?' In essence, what Heidegger is referring to when using this word is 'what becomes present in presencing.' Please see *Glossary*.

<sup>9</sup> Within an ontological context, 'actual' refers to an entity which has a philosophical status of fundamental ontological priority. A 'real' entity can be read as one which may be actual, or may derive its reality from its logical relation to some actual entity or entities.

<sup>10</sup> John Vaughn Gordon, *The Theme of Isolation in Clare's Poetry*, MA thesis. U of Durham, 1983, 29.

David E. Cooper notes that Heidegger wrote on ‘the subject of nature in a variety of contexts of enquires.’<sup>11</sup> Cooper categorises a general chronology for these enquiries that could be described as having ontological, methodological and technological foundations.

Heidegger’s questions address the philosophy of nature or the kind of Being nature possesses. His central claim, in this context, positions his thought against the Cartesian idea. The Cartesian idea is refuted by Heidegger because it is ‘the result of a severe abstraction of conceptions closer to our everyday experience of and engagement with the world.’<sup>12</sup> Cartesianism privileges only material entities, ‘behaving in accordance with laws of nature.’ As Heidegger privileges a concept he refers to in *Being and Time* as *present-at-hand*, he illustrates just how ‘the question of Being has been forgotten.’<sup>13</sup> For him, the presentness of nature is not just an empirical matter. He is interested in how the natural world comes into Being, its ways of revealing its *Beingness* to *Dasein* and for *Dasein* to experience it and engage with it. Thus, Heidegger’s ontological enquiries into nature could be termed the primordially of nature as *physis*, the inherent quality of a being, or its nature; or in other words, the disclosedness of nature as its own truth.

Heidegger’s revision of the word ‘truth’ to signify disclosedness helps to make possible an ontological reading of Clare’s perception of nature and his affiliation and exchange with and dependency on it. When Clare depicts the world of nature, there is an aesthetic of joy. Parallel to this is a poetry that exemplifies the primordially of nature *qua physis*. Such poems convey the purity of visual phenomena and Clare’s delight in describing his absorption into nature’s Being. Nature’s *Beingness* is at times beyond Clare’s descriptive words as his poetry can only record the evocation of nature’s pure ontological essences. As nature discloses itself *qua physis* to Clare, the truth of its *Beingness* produces a different mode of seeing in the poet as he surveys the natural landscape. This different type of seeing

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<sup>11</sup> David E. Cooper, ‘Heidegger on Nature’ *Environmental Values*, 14.3 (2005): 339-51 (340).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 341.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 21:2.



can be termed a duality of vision; Clare is overwhelmed by the ‘truth’ of nature to the point where he is prompted to consider the ‘truth’ of human Being.

Clare’s nature poems reduce phenomena to their essences and illuminate how his poetic style and approach reveal his thought processes and agency as narrator and communicator. When the theme of nature in Clare’s poetry is examined by critics such as Thomas Frosch<sup>14</sup> and Janet Todd<sup>15</sup> such critics have read Clare’s style as one which participates in simultaneous layers; and because of the poems’ simultaneous awareness, they are right to do so. Their discussions illuminate a variety of disciplines. Frosch documents change through Clare’s descriptive poems whilst Todd attends to the concept of an Eden Clare wished to eternalise.<sup>16</sup> Misty Beck writing on visual mimesis in Clare<sup>17</sup> makes the comment that Clare’s nature poems have shown themselves to be flexible and independent texts.<sup>18</sup> Beck argues that Clare’s nature poetry is marked ‘with a linguistic mimicking of perceptual structures—Clare is able to construct landscapes that have multiple meanings, at once ecological and moral, social and natural, and often deeply ironic. It is in this pastoral mode of apprehension and perception that Clare’s images acquire vividness and power, taking on multiple levels of meaning through a richly embedded human perception of natural objects, as Williams explains so well.’<sup>19</sup>

The critic whom Beck cites is Raymond Williams. Williams discusses diachronic and synchronic variations in his study *The Country and the City*<sup>20</sup> from a literary perspective. He notes that the ‘English pastoral was marked by an increasing attention to natural detail and to

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Frosch, ‘The Descriptive Style of John Clare’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 10.2 (1971): 137- 49.

<sup>15</sup> Janet Todd, *‘In Adam’s Garden’: A Study of John Clare’s Pre-Asylum Poetry* (Gainesville: Florida UP, 1973).

<sup>16</sup> Please see Gregg Crossan’s study ‘A Relish for Eternity’: *The Process of Divination in the Pre-Asylum Poetry of John Clare* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1976) for a fuller treatment of this subject.

<sup>17</sup> Misty Beck, *Visual Mimesis in Clare’s Open Fields*, *JCSJ* 21 (2002): 24-32 (24).

<sup>18</sup> Paraphrased from *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973).

sensory perception.<sup>21</sup> It is within this context that Williams frames his discussion of Clare's nature poetry, observing that this poetry offers a closer description of nature – of birds, trees, and effects of weather and of light, Williams also conveys Clare's individualised relationship with nature. Williams notices that 'the close observation and description of nature Wordsworth and Clare write about is mediated by a projection of personal feeling into subjectivity particularised and objectively generalised.'<sup>22</sup> The similarities that Williams observes between Wordsworth and Clare are accurate and certainly pertinent. However, what is significant for a comparison between Wordsworth and Clare, and for the focus of this chapter, is, as Williams says, 'an individualised relationship with nature.' This is located in the difference between the poets' ambitions, direction and visions of nature. Wordsworth's major achievements occur when he is 'dramatizing the human confrontation with the natural world.'<sup>23</sup> Clare's individual poetic characteristic is to be found in his treatment of nature as he finds nature: 'Clare's vision, as genuine as Wordsworth's, is unconnected with the paraphernalia of Romantic theorizing.'<sup>24</sup>

The characteristic concerns of Clare critics such as Frosch and Todd are indicative of Clare writing under the generative force of a creative or thematic purpose. Whilst matters of style and voice are both valid and relevant, Clare's preoccupation with nature is a theme that requires a different approach. An ontological treatment proves to be germane; it reveals how Clare explains and evaluates humanness in the presence of the disclosedness of nature.

The expression of the unspoilt world of nature in Clare's poems attests to the harmonic disassociation of the two worlds of the human and the natural he inhabits. Through this style, Clare's reader is given the sense of what ontology is able to bring to his conscious awareness. Therefore, Clare's technique of giving (enlivening objects using words which,

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

<sup>23</sup> W. J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1980) 40. Hereafter, *The Poetry of Nature*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

according to Heidegger, takes art out of the scene and leaves the scene) can be read as *givenness*. This unusual collective noun can be used to describe more than one act of giving, since nature too also gives. It is a giver of its ontological essences. This idea of *givenness* will now be illustrated using two poems which will show Clare's energising of phenomena. Another poem will provide a contrast by demonstrating how Clare 'gets' nature's innerness by *being-in* and thinking on, rather than abstracting and commenting on those abstractions from a position that is ontologically distant from the *essence* of poetry. The poem 'Beans in Blossom' (1819-32)<sup>25</sup> attests to Clare at his most characteristic. The poem is also symptomatic of Clare practising his usual rhetorical strategies. Enjoying 'The south west wind [that is] pleasant in the face' (1), Clare is walking across newly ploughed fields (3). The customary visual awareness is in operation, working to record the changes in the imagery of the 'old wood' (4) as Clare walks; and it is as if nature, who dominates the sonnet, is also allowed to utter its own descriptions. Although Clare wants to convey a sense of stillness, everything that is a part of the poem is subject to movement. If the vibrancy of their colours can be disregarded, it is only the '...clover blossoms red & tawny white' (13) that do not stir and create an impression. The poem moves and is constantly in motion. The south west wind breathes while sauntering (1); the bees sing and toil as they carry home their 'yellow spoils' (9-10); 'The herd cows toss the mole hills in their play' (11); and Clare roams whilst proving a vantage-point of coherent perception.

Similarly, the metrical pattern of the changing stresses of each line thwarts Clare's objective which is to convey the peacefulness and free spirit of nature. The rhythmic intonations and cadences of the alternating rhyme scheme contribute to the false imagery of the stillness of the phenomena. Whilst they are suggestive of diction that is quiet and still, this perception is brought about by the calmness of rhymes which are essentially assonant.

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<sup>25</sup> John Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, 5 vols (vol.4), eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 191-92.

Nevertheless, the rhymes draw attention to their buoyancy exemplified in lines three and four:

I roam these new ploughd fields & by the side  
Of this old wood where happy birds abide

The final evocation of the betrayal of a sense of nature's stillness is the reflection of sound. The array and plenitude of acoustics and phonetics pulsing throughout the sonnet distract and obfuscate the profusion of nature's nature. The sounds are derived from natural forces, intimating the intelligible reality of the natural environment rather than the undefined space of nature and itself as *aletheia*. 'Beans in Blossom' showcases Clare's typical descriptive style, yet, the disclosedness of nature *qua physis* is to be found in a different type of descriptive which is not 'mere' since it is a poem layered with a different ontology.

As Heidegger contends, the disclosedness of nature is different from the presence and presencing of what can be taken as nature's truth. The plethora of theories whose aims are to determine what the 'truth' of nature is tend to fall into abstract categorizations. Whether nature has been commodified through modern technology or through the dynamics of economic forces, or whether nature corresponds to the Romantic ideal of it as a wild and free entity untrammelled by human feet and human experiences contributes to the measure of nature's 'truth.' What is also considered by Heidegger is the apprehension of nature through human experience 'Since all possible human experience of nature is partly mediated by past experience and selective consciousness anyway, we may be able to define nature, and then defend nature experience, by reference to the extent to which the natural areas have not been instrumentalised according to the dictates of particular types of anti-naturalistic instrumental rationality.'<sup>26</sup> For Clare, his series of exchanges and correspondences with the truthfulness of nature, does not come by theory or indeed through poetry. Writing on nature and the

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<sup>26</sup> Piers H.G. Stephens, 'Nature, Purity, Ontology', *Environmental Values* 9.3, (2000): 267-94 (273).

profusion of nature's beautiful scenes, Clare's poetry characterises that connection between thinking and presentness. 'Entity thought' and 'entity thinking'<sup>27</sup> (thinking about the thing in a metaphysical way) are displaced by reflective thinking (thinking on the source of what is to be thought about) and thus, Being discloses itself as presence. It is in this way that the *Beingness* of nature discloses itself as *physis* to Clare by reason of his ability to perceive the reality of its operative mystery which is truly revelatory.

Both Raymond Williams and W.J. Keith write about the commonalities they see in the style Wordsworth and Clare when the poets apprehend nature's bounties. Raymond is keen to accentuate both Wordsworth's and Clare's personal relationship with nature. W.J. Keith, however, highlights the heterogeneous ways Wordsworth and Clare apprehend the scenic qualities of landscapes and produce their nature poetry according to their differing perspectives. Wordsworth ponders and injects moralism, whilst Clare 'sees.' Citing John Middleton Murry who is discussing such differences 'in relation to Wordsworth's attitude towards Peter Bell', Keith writes:

Clare...was someone to whom a primrose by the river's brim was in a sense, just a primrose; but it was wholly a primrose, not "something more" indeed, but altogether itself...If Wordsworth had seen a primrose as Clare saw it – and he did occasionally see things thus – he would have felt that he was "seeing into the heart of things," whereas Clare who seems always to have seen in this – felt that he was merely seeing things.<sup>28</sup>

Clare's perception is one which is being downplayed. He sees, but Wordsworth sees with a more shrewd discernment. It is perception *per se*, but more specifically, the perception of Clare and the description of his perception as 'merely' which is of interest here. Wordsworth's seeing impresses upon his creative mind, not just the thing, but also the context of the thing. By contrast, Clare, it is being claimed, is a superficial observer, seeing

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<sup>27</sup> David A. White, *Heidegger and the Language of Poetry* (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1979) 149.

<sup>28</sup> Keith, *The Poetry of Nature*, 43.

only the objects without insight. Such critical positions lack insight as they uphold Clare's poetic status as naïve. Clare is a poet whose words bring forth the intimacy between world and thing. He is a poet who perceives the *Seiendheit* of the thing and the ontology of the 'what- is' of the natural object which expresses 'ultimate essence[s]...beyond 'a[n]'\...aesthetic construct.'<sup>29</sup> Therefore, Clare reveals a similar sentimentally poetic intuition to what allows Wordsworth to set up sensory and artistic symbols that always point to something more. A number of Clare's nature poems are texts which demonstrate his poetry's ability to be the poēsis of existence and poetry's relationship to Being. Clare's poem 'Nature' (1819-20)<sup>30</sup> illustrates this particular phenomenon.

The poem does not come over as a pictorial impression; it is 'more than an intermingling of activity and stasis.'<sup>31</sup> 'Nature' encompasses much more. It brings to language the concrete experience of perceiving a glimpse of nature's interior consciousness. Clare, in this instance, is still recognisable as the poet who writes odes to nature but this poem offers a different appreciation of the natural world. The informed descriptions of plants and natural phenomena remain, yet, the descriptions are invested in an ambiguity of emotion and wonderment. What is present, is the feeling of being overcome by something he perceives, but cannot transpose into language. The poem's initial line, 'O simple nature how I do delight' for example, is denied some of the sublime sensation it is providing by reason of Clare being overwrought; not by nature as art and its ability to produce the beautiful, but because it is for Clare, a higher reality. Taking pleasure in nature once more, while 'Tracing the lane path' (4) on [a] 'summer night' (3), Clare's uncomplicated diction provides access to his awareness of the transmission of physical sense impressions. The process of his expanding perception, as nature conveys her 'truth', is communicated in a style that is as

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<sup>29</sup> Chilcott, 'A Real World', 95.

<sup>30</sup> Clare, *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger, vol.2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 29-30.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (New Jersey: Princeton UP) 339.

usual to Clare as the style of him roaming and reporting. Even as he conveys the images of how picturesque the lane is ‘where the dog rose hings / Wi dew drops seathd while chickering cricket sings’ (4-5), the poem conveys Clare’s delight at experiencing nature’s ‘inside’ details. As his eyes glance upon the leaves of the dog rose covered in dew drops (6), Clare speaks of ‘loves warm beauty’ (7) which steals the dog rose’s leaves ‘sweetest blush’ (7). These lines possess a curious double focus. First, they personify nature as though Clare is talking to a beautiful woman, one who possesses the same beauty Byron pays tribute to when using the phrase ‘nameless grace’ (8) in the poem ‘She walks in Beauty’ (1815).<sup>32</sup> The profound beauty of the leaves seem to enjoy an almost supernatural or magical quality. ‘Loves warm beauty’, not love itself, and not human fingers, have stolen the bush’s sweetest blush (7). This is more of a metamorphic act that takes place when nature frees itself from implications and subjective interpretations and discloses itself to those who are attuned to its ‘truth.’ When love steals the leaves’ sweetest blush, it attests to the warm chaos of words and their palpable matter-of-factness, attempting to become harmonised with the differentiated immeasurable existence of nature’s essence. Secondly, the lines document that moment when the creative response is allocated a passive role whilst the consciousness of the observer is overwhelmed with self-evident truth:

O how I feel just as I pluck the flower  
 & stick it to my breast—words cant reveal

(11-12)

Clare’s joyous and expressive feelings are a revelation of how fully conscious he is of himself, both as a spectator of beautiful nature, and as a poet. To ‘walk with nature as a living thing’ (13) as he writes in the poem ‘Spring’ (1823)<sup>33</sup> testifies to Clare’s understanding of

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<sup>32</sup> Lord Bryon, ‘She Walks in Beauty’, *Byron: Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Frederick Page (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970) 77-78 (78).

<sup>33</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.3, 25-48 (26).

nature. For him, it is something that is able to occupy its own realm. The living sounds of nature's essentia<sup>34</sup> and the perceptiveness of Clare, awakened and immersed in nature's forces, are able to meet and merge. This is an example of the meditative description from Clare which illustrates the perfect merging of human life and nature which is not easily discernible in other poems whose function is to relay the precise detail of phenomenon of objects such as small flowers ('The Snowdrops' 1819-20)<sup>35</sup>, insects ('The Ants' 1819-20)<sup>36</sup> and other natural features ('Farewell to a Thicket' 1808-19).<sup>37</sup> It is occasions such as these in the human / nature relationship that the deeper insight of Clare's perception of nature brings him to an almost metaphysical understanding of primal nature in its *Seiendheit*. His capacity to fully respond to nature's primordality does not result in his poetry struggling to communicate what is taking place. His diction remains consciously poetic, but is intense in its perception of nature's super-senory thing-structure. Such is its focus that the poem is dependent on end rhymes to achieve its want for musicality and symmetry. Nevertheless, the end rhymes are irregular and at times, fall into unpredictability (lines 7, 9 and 10). They leave it to Clare's trusted iambic pentameters to provide a sense of undulations and metrical impact in order to vitalise Clare's spirited response to nature's poetic disclosedness.

Clare's humanity and his experience of nature equate to the uniting of his Being with the ontology of nature. 'When sweet the while the even silence heaves' (8), the connecting links between instinct, consciousness and perception become tenuous. What remains certain, is Clare's awareness of the very interiority of nature's *thing*. Clare uses poetic diction not to speak of appropriation but of mutual disclosure. Using poetry's creative force, Clare unfolds

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<sup>34</sup> The word essential is synonymous with the word 'essence', a term that Heidegger seeks to employ in conjunction with the word 'existentia' when he is talking about things that are not *Dasein*.

<sup>35</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.2, 317.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1, 20.



Being's poem. According to Heidegger, this is the poem of man's existence and the light of Being itself.<sup>38</sup>

As nature's 'pausing breath just trembling thro the bush' (9) arrests Clare's attention, he communicates with his readers through the immediacy of his sensations and what is impressed upon him and not the autonomy of his stored knowledge. As a result, his reader gains intelligible access to his experiences. Thus, when he claims that his 'words cant reveal' (12) the quality of these mutually embracing instances, the sensuousness of his description of how he feels just as he 'plucks the flower' (11) and sticks it to his breast (12), defies his own sense of ineffability. Clare finds words for the feeling and sensing of ontology's utterances. Nature's bounties, in a kind of ontological synthesis, assimilate Clare's Being into its Beingness presenting a more organic view of nature and humanity.

The effervescence of feeling which can be derived from Clare's diction is a reminder that his self-consciousness is a significant presence within his nature poems. Clare does more than observe and describe. He is conscious of nature's scenic details and conscious of the presence of his poetic consciousness and of how what he sees will become poetry.

In the reading of 'Beans in Blossom' it was suggested that natural environmental sounds were responsible for the Being of nature being occluded and inaudible. Whilst stillness and silence aid the coalescence of Clare's experience with the disclosedness of nature *qua physis*, it is Clare who discriminates between, on the one hand, what he sees and associates with nature and, on the other hand, what nature itself gives to him. The disclosedness by nature of its own ontology validates Clare's experience. Through his perception, Clare comes *to be* a part of nature rather than *knowing* nature.

The wide range of criticism affirming Clare's ecological knowledge, such as Margaret Grainger's *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare* (1983) and James McKusick's

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<sup>38</sup> Heidegger, 'The Thinker as Poet', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 1-14 (4).

chapter on Clare in *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (2000), warrants further explanation of the word ‘know.’ For a green poet such as Clare, it is rather evident to say that he is very familiar with nature. In a large number of his poems he speaks with authority and in detail about Helpston’s landscapes, names types of flowers and recognises birds and their nests. In addition, John Barrell’s 1972 monograph also makes transparent Clare’s knowledge of Helpston’s walkways, fields and local nature. But lying in between Clare’s knowledge and his experience is the matter of how the *Seiendheit* of nature is made available to his poetic psyche. Some of his most characteristic poetry, which is mainly discernible in *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), attests to that type of poetry whereby his knowledge of nature does indeed generate the act of seeing, observing and writing. Yet, there is poetry within Clare’s output which moves beyond such processes and brings to the fore his metaphysical experience when nature uncovers its truth. What results is an infusion into his green epistemology of a vitality that stems from nature itself. The poetry Clare writes through the channels of what I should like to refer to as sensational phenomenology, is poetry that captures nature as ‘truth’ in its truth as opposed to something that only shows itself. When in the presence of nature *qua physis*, due to his lack of determination to understand or interpret nature, but, simply to see and perceive *the something* that lies behind nature in its *aletheia*, the fundamental difference between Clare’s knowledge and Clare’s knowing can be made known.

Unlike the Romantic appropriation of nature, Clare’s response to nature’s self- generating *thing-as-itself* is a naked response. Not weighed down with conceptual applications or rationalistic explorations, Clare’s nature poetry stymies allegorical gestures. There are, however, those occasions when Clare’s nature poems resemble Romanticism’s capacity for enjoying nature through its sensibility and passion. As Maurice Shroder observes, ‘The Romantic association of nature and spirit expressed itself in one of two ways. The landscape

was, on one hand regarded as an extension of the human personality, capable of sympathy with man's emotional state. On other hand, nature was regarded as a vehicle...to delight in unspoilt scenery.<sup>39</sup>

An untitled poem dated 1832-35<sup>40</sup> beginning with the line 'I feel at times so sweet a mood', is illustrative of this Romantic duality in Clare's relationship with nature. The poem also records the tangible similarities between the relationships some of the major Romantics such as John Keats share with nature. A poet who 'encompasses sensibility, and the world of interior consciousness'<sup>41</sup>, much of Keats' poetic inspiration according to Stuart M. Sperry springs from Keats' 'notion of "sensation"....for the conception bears directly on his sense of the nature of the materials from which poetry springs, the way it operates upon them, and the manner in which it differs from or transcends them.'<sup>42</sup> Achieving much of Keats' effects but operating from an almost phenomenological premise, Clare's nature poetry, at times, brings forth the immanence of nature through his poetry's primal creative abilities. The untitled poem is demonstrative of how, due to his poetic imagination being dislocated, Clare's nature poems lend support to Heidegger's belief that language at the poetic level is a revelation of Being because it 'reaches into its truth.'<sup>43</sup> For Heidegger, poetry is 'Projective saying.'<sup>44</sup> This is evident when he writes:

Poetry is the saying of the unconcealedness of what is...Projective saying is saying which, in preparing the sayable, simultaneously brings the unsayable as such into a world.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Maurice Z. Shroder, *Icarus: The Image of the Artist in French Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961) 80.

<sup>40</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol. 5, 51.

<sup>41</sup> Sperry, *Keats the Poet*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger, ix.

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, 'OWA', 74.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

This, as Heidegger claims, allows for humanity as *Dasein* to be brought closer to a more genuine experience with Being. Clare's poem is an exemplification of how Heidegger makes primordial the *physis* of nature rather than the presencing of nature. Writing in 'the rhetoric of freedom'<sup>46</sup> the untitled poem communicates Clare's conscious grasp of nature's sensational ontology. The poem follows in full:

I feel at times so sweet a mood  
That sweetens life or else decieves  
In autumn by a hedge or wood  
When paths are strewn with yellow leaves

The birds scar[c]e move from bough to bough  
But leaves will rustle twirl & fall  
I look a wilderness hides me now  
& something sweeter dwells on all

From whence a pleasure is recieved  
How different to the moods of spring  
& yet how sweet is all relieved  
Like hope upon a swallows wing

The desire to participate in alternate worlds is a recurrent element in Clare's poetry. A great number of his poems records Clare's thinking of heaven such as 'To Religion'<sup>47</sup> as an alternative place to earth and to life. In similar fashion, there are poems which express Clare's desire to be in the presence of unspoilt nature and serves his wish to be 'elsewhere.' This untitled poem does not depict the transcending of Clare to the otherness of a different physical world. It documents the encounter of the physical and mental processes of Clare's consciousness merging into the *Seiendheit* of nature. When Clare begins to speak the truth of his thoughts, they are affirmed and in that same moment, they become undermined by the

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<sup>46</sup> Timothy Ziegenhagen, 'John Clare's "Domestic Tree": Freedom and Home in 'The Fallen Elm'', *Romanticism, Ecology, and Pedagogy* (2006): 1-23 (2).

<sup>47</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1, 444-45.

truth of life. Whilst he is feeling a part of the ‘sweet mood’ (1) of nature inhabiting its own ontology, both his poetic and existential consciousness are pricked into measuring the genuineness of the sweet mood. The latter either sweetens life or it ‘deceives.’ The mood, the syntactical focus of the stanza, is so different compared to the other moods Clare experiences in the *everydayness* of life. Therefore, his misgivings about its sweetness are understandable. From poems that address the theme of hope such as ‘Address to a Lark Singing in Winter’ (1815)<sup>48</sup>, (the hope of a more comfortable earthly life), ‘To an Hour Glass’ (1819-20)<sup>49</sup> and ‘Expectation’ (1819)<sup>50</sup> (the hope for a better life in eternity), it is fair to say that Clare is very aware of life’s tendency to increase the despondency of the individual. Therefore, his mistrust of the sweet mood is not only understandable but justified. However, as the bliss of what nature is gains Clare’s full attention and consumes his feelings, the presence of the existential begins to crumble and break away.

‘In autumn by a hedge or wood / When paths are strewn with yellow leaves’ (3-4), Clare is free without interruption to project his Being onto the sweet mood of nature’s sensuousness. The sense impressions that the material phenomena create occupy the ‘sweet mood’ and are heightened further by the auditory assonant rhymes. Stanza two, as it translates the event of the projection of the *aletheia* of nature, and the Being of Clare, is fertile in its transitive utterances. The imagery this stanza produces is both visual and tactile. ‘Leaves will rustle twirl & fall’ (6) as the sensation of phenomenon overwhelms Clare’s consciousness, but the ‘birds scarcely move from bough to bough’ (5). There is no sense of Clare only looking and observing. He is also seeing what he is feeling. This duality of vision is what provides the glimpse into the *physis* of nature. As he sees the ‘wildness’ that hides him (7), the excess of nature’s ontology causes Clare to be ravished by its sensations, almost

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 99-101.

<sup>49</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.2, 320.

<sup>50</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.153-54.

in the same way John Donne conveys his experience of his want for God.<sup>51</sup> The wildness he both looks at, and feels, is the *Seiendheit* of nature expressed in words. This is a natural experience which stems from a natural occurrence from a poet whose relationship with nature is tantamount to ‘respon[ding] to Being from one’s own Being.’<sup>52</sup>

Whilst Clare is being apprehended by nature, and at the same time being hid by the wildness, ‘something sweeter dwells on all’ (8). This phrase in its simplistic aim to gesture to the complexity of nature’s consciousness manages to achieve some slight comprehension of the latter together with apprehending the essential truth of nature. The Beingness that pulsates through this phrase reveals what Clare’s mind perceives, and, it is not along a trajectory driven by instinct or imagination that leads to reason. The surety of his perception is made viable because of nature existing as an extension of Clare’s Being. From this premise, the wonder and awe that nature *qua physis* inspires as truth rather than as an entity, is assimilated by Clare as ‘pleasure [being] received’ (9). The poem, however, does not end with more ecstatic moments of Clare being enthralled by nature’s exposed innerness. It takes a short excursion into a comparison between the ‘sweet mood’ this poem exalts and ‘the moods of spring’ (10). The poem is making plain the difference in the channels that transfer sensation. The season of spring incites delight and an appreciation of beauty that is transported through beautiful imagery and pastoral scenes. However, what Clare naturally assimilates is brought forth through channels of ontological perception and the coalescence of the mind with nature. Clare is absorbed into nature as *Seiendheit*. But with his mentioning of the fleetingness of hope which he compares to a swallow’s wing (12), the poem reverts to the cares of life.

In the presence of the *physis* of nature as seen in the previous poem, Clare’s thoughts tend to become influenced by the truth of life and human nature. Clare’s meditations on

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<sup>51</sup> Sentence refers to John Donne’s Holy Sonnet 14 ‘Batter my heart, three Person’d God’ (1633). Quoted from *John Donne The Complete Poems*, ed. A.J Smith (London: Penguin, 1973) 314.

<sup>52</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger, x.

‘nature’s essence in its purest state,’<sup>53</sup> which inspires his thinking of human Being, surface in the midst of nature’s disclosedness and subsequent truth. His consciousness, in the supernatural closeness of nature as *aletheia*, makes the natural progression from feeling to thinking and thus, an existential consciousness emerges. Clare’s encounters with nature and the natural world are more than time spent looking and loving, seeing and being delighted.

A short poem entitled ‘Worldly Minds’ (1820’s, early 1830’s)<sup>54</sup> provides some insight into how Clare is perturbed by worldly minds that walk past nature without heeding it. Whilst Wordsworth uses the suitability of nature both as a pedagogic and homiletic resource in ‘The Tables Turned’ (1798) to address the human / nature relationship, Clare is concerned to describe the type of existence in which the individual does not ‘lift the painted veil.’<sup>55</sup> The poem is at once both personal and intense in its insight. The diction it employs, free from the concerns that subdue individual awareness, attests to its profound confidence. Its style is to present the idea that what is precious in and to life is hidden and will only be found by those with a desire for a more elevated experience. The poem is split into three sections, giving the impression that each one is different and unrelated. Each section though is correlated, one with the other, through Clare’s main argument for discernment.

The poem begins with Clare asserting ‘Sweet poesy in nature’s bosom dwells.’ Apart from being a beautiful example of visual imagery, the line lends itself to Hölderlin’s poignant question, ‘What are poets for in a destitute time?’<sup>56</sup> Resonant of Hölderlin’s concern, Clare too outlines the destitute times of those with ‘the unheeding eye’ (2). For Hölderlin, poetry is the language that appropriates mortals to divinities, earth to sky, things to places and

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<sup>53</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, ‘Sonnet’, vol.2, 386.

<sup>54</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period*, vol. 2, 162.

<sup>55</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Lift not the Painted Veil’ (1818), *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1934) 569.

<sup>56</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, ‘Bread and Wine’ (1800-01). The line has been quoted from Heidegger’s essay ‘What are Poets for?’ Quoted in Heidegger, *Poetry Language, Thought*, 91-142. (91). The poem appears in full in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, Trans. Michael Hamburger (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 243-53.

functions.<sup>57</sup> Poetry leads the individual to that space in *the Clearing*<sup>58</sup>, a place in which the ontological capacity found there is able to lead to an *ereignis*. Here, the occasion for the individual or *Dasein* to realise its *falling*<sup>59</sup> into *The They* is made possible. *The They*<sup>60</sup> is an insidious body of Others who level down *Daesin* into *publicness*. This is an ontological mood or way-to-be in which *Dasein*, is absorbed into *everydayness* causing it to lose its potentiality-for-being-itself<sup>61</sup> and its *ownmost possibilities*.<sup>62</sup>

Whilst Clare is not seeking to posit a philosophical critique of human Being, he, like Heidegger, recognizes ‘the existential characteristics of the disclosedness of *Being-in-the-world*.’<sup>63</sup>

Still clowns & wordly minded men pass bye  
Unheeding all—nay these are fashion bred

(9-10)

The ‘worldly minded men’ (9) or *Dasein* in its ontological state of *Fallenness* do not see, so they cannot discern their inauthentic existential dispositions. Hence, as *Dasein*, far away from itself, indulges in *Idle talk*,<sup>64</sup> the worldliness of the world asserts its primacy in the life of the individual. They miss the value of other truths such as nature’s, due to their dulled consciousness:

As luscious as honey in the secret cells  
Of summers wild bees unobservd doth lye  
Spring comes & goes the summers radiance falls  
In all the splendour of earths majesty

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<sup>57</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger, xiv.

<sup>58</sup> *The clearing* is a space for Being to show itself in its essence and where any ontological event such as an *Ereignis* can occur. Please refer to *Glossary*.

<sup>59</sup> *Falling* is a term Heidegger uses in *Being and Time*. It describes the ontological in which *Dasein* is away from itself and being controlled by *The They*. Please refer to *Glossary*.

<sup>60</sup> Please see *Glossary*.

<sup>61</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 164:127-168:130.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 68:42.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 167:210.

<sup>64</sup> *Idle talk* says Heidegger, is the language fallen *Dasein* speaks when it is levelled down in *Publicness*. *Dasein* talks of things which have already been established and is a result of being-with-one-another. ‘Idle talk’ is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the things one’s own. For Heidegger, It is a groundless language in which *The They* continues to prescribe what inauthentic or fallen *Dasein* sees and hears. *Being and Time*, 169-70; 212-13.



The autumn oer its wildness vainly brawls  
From swollen floods & tempest painted sky

(3-8)

Poetry is more than utterances and nature more than a ubiquitous aesthetic entity. The nature of poetry as the *saying* of truth, and the truth of nature which is, by its very nature poetic, make possible a metaphysical experience of another reality. Nature inspires the Being of its truth to disclose itself as *aletheia* whilst poetry calls to nature in its truth. In 'Worldly Minds' it is Clare's belief that the two do not digress from one another. Nature and poetry articulate nature as *physis* which makes what is 'Hid from the gaze of the unheeding eye' (2) intelligible. It is the human condition and the way the individual becomes submerged in *The They* which causes them to live de-vitalized lives.

Clare's existential ontological thinking is carried out much in the same way as when he observes wildlife and natural scenes. His attentiveness to what lies in the phenomenal world is also applied to what lies in the depths of the immanence of human Being. As Clare continues to consider his *being-in-the-world*, the theme of discernment is once again at the core of his observations.

The poem 'Natures Melodys the Calm' (1830)<sup>65</sup> is driven by Clare's Christian beliefs. For Clare, it is 'A sterner power' (11) who is trying to appeal to the individual to heed the lessons nature is trying to teach. Stanza one outlines the first lesson. The dust beneath Clare's feet is being lifted up by the wind. Clare uses this imagery to explain how dust, the individual after death, 'shall greet the skys' (4). Similarly, the flowers and grass beside Clare's path (5) 'In trembling joy their praises pay / Yet unobserving man goes bye' (7). They 'unobserve' (7) 'nature's breath in quiet moods [that] wooes the heart in gentle ways' (9-10). The poem is significant in its comment on the value of death in life and the type of existence an individual dwells in. Heidegger's existential ontological terms are required here in order to provide a

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<sup>65</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period*, vol.3, 423-24.

language for what occupies Clare in this poem. Through essentially auditory but irregular rhymes, Clare is discussing what he interprets as an authentic life. Although Clare has yet to be fully discussed as a religious poet, his belief in a faith system is discernible amongst his poetry ‘Where nature dwells in ample throng.’<sup>66</sup> No contention arises then, when the poet states that the path able to lead to existential meaningfulness is to be found in faith and the idea of a ‘Life everlastingly enjoyed’ (33). Thus, authenticity according to Clare, is to prepare for death and meet a Higher Being:

A sterner power with time intrudes  
 Shall waken all to fear & praise  
 When death shall rise on every eye  
 & blend his voice with every call  
 When all but natures debt shall die  
 & man the debtor pay for all

(11-16)

Authenticity for Heidegger is of course ontologically derived. To become authentic, *Dasein* must call itself from within itself out of *publicness* and become resolute. What this summarises is *Dasein* becomes an authentic being by resolutely facing its own possibility for impossibility (death). *Dasein* is a part of its own trajectory to authenticity but for Clare, nature is the external force that appeals to the individual. The ‘mighty storms’ (17) and ‘thunders dread alarms’ (19) typify the day of reckoning. Yet, the individual ‘Neglects to feel the part he’s in’ (27). Individuals cannot know the truth nature speaks because they cannot discern ‘nature’s breath in quiet moods’ (9). The ontology of nature *qua physis* cannot be engineered, nor can it be seen. It must be felt and mediated upon, as it seeks to impart to the perceptive individual its desire to become one with human Being. Although ‘Natures Melodys the Calm’ outlines a fundamental difference in Clare and Heidegger regarding the attainment of authenticity, the poem illuminates their mutual commonality. Both poet and

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<sup>66</sup> Clare, *Early Poems* vol. 1 ‘The Morning Walk’, 494-97 (Line 92).

philosopher are interested in defining life and what must be faced by *Dasein* when it realises the diminishing of its temporality.

How human Being can be transformed into a genuinely elevated experience is a task Clare intermittently sets himself. At the same time, his endeavours help to reveal the latency of his philosophical dimensions. The sharp echoes from Clare's poetry dated 1820-22, which sees him tracing human Being in the mode of a poetic thinker, can also be identified in his poetry from the asylum years where sorrow becomes his main contemplation. The same observant skills he uses to describe the wildlife and natural scenes in his early poetry are also employed to think through the human condition. Clare can often be read grappling with the meaning of life, its purpose and its value. An untitled decalet, (mid 1820's-early 1830's)<sup>67</sup> testifies to such an occasion. Imposing his vision upon the continuation of life, Clare sees that 'Life rolls her millions on earths ocean wide / Like the upheaving of a mighty tide' (1-2). Clare's use of the present simple verb 'rolls' and the description of earth as a wide ocean dramatises Clare's apprehension of human existence in its depth and reality. The structure of the grammar for the two lines supports Clare's existential perspective. Life is authoritative and in control. Hence, it dominates as the subject of the poem's lines. It is also life which performs the action and, from the tone of the phrase 'earths wide ocean', it is evident that it is also life which submerges the individual in *The They* and obfuscates the meaning of life itself. Life rolls on for the millions in *everydayness* as they travel through life's journey ignorantly 'neath the smiling sun.' (3) Rather than the word 'plan' Clare chooses the word 'ply [ing]' (4). This evokes the sense of oblivion Clare seeks to convey. The millions mould or shape their lives in harmony with the dictates of the world and 'The Others.' This...state

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<sup>67</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period*, vol.2, 309.

of Being, in its everyday kind of Being, is what proximally misses itself and covers itself up.<sup>68</sup>

The flat lands of the earth are interpreted by Clare as water, something vast and constantly in flux. Clare's water imagery instils into the poem the idea of constant movement. It is also the language of turbulence the poem sustains though notions of peaking and ebbing. Moreover, Clare's projection of despair for humanity is an assured fact by virtue of its endless beginnings and endings. The natural world Clare characteristically presents has become dark and distorted. This is a poem of meditation and agency:

Till comes the ebb of death—& then the rush  
Of lifes gay billows in a moment hush  
To deadly calms—so with oertaking speed  
New tides & ebbs alternately succeed  
& good and bad like shadows & sunlight  
Sink endless in the nothingness of night

(5-8)

The consistent references to newness, demise and renewal reveal Clare's thoughts on life. It is unremarkable because 'New Tides and ebbs alternately succeed' (8). This short untitled poem is the poetic incarnation of the transience of mortality into the endless nothingness of night (10). Nevertheless, on other numerous poetic occasions such as 'The Setting Sun'<sup>69</sup> Clare has spoken of the soul winging their way to heaven (14).

A suggested way of reading the last line of the untitled poem is to relate Heidegger's concept of *Idle Talk*. *Idle Talk* refers to a form of groundless discourse without apprehension or understanding whereby the individual is submerged 'Into the nothingness of scorn and noise.'<sup>70</sup> The individual is unable to contemplate Being, their Being and their existence. Their

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<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 168:130.

<sup>69</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1, 150.

<sup>70</sup> Clare, 'I am', *The Later Poems of John Clare*, vol.1, 396-97 (396).

potential to exist in their 'ownmost *Dasein* alone'<sup>71</sup> diminishes as *The They* constantly, moment by moment, submerges *Dasein* into a meaningless existence. *Dasein* will not be able to come into contact with the truth of life nature tries to guide them to, or more importantly, to themselves. Their authentic Being 'vanish [es] in oblivion's host.'<sup>72</sup>

Clare's lines bear the force of his vision of existential reality and his version of the meaning of life. The poem enacts the need for transience. Using almost platitudinous imagery of tidal fluctuations as a way to speak of life and death, the poem accentuates its exclusive message. Life is a mystery to be probed and discovered. Only those who seek a different and higher experience will be able to hear and become a part of the truth of nature and the truth of a meaningful life.

This idea of a meaningful life preoccupies Clare in all sections of his poetic output. How life shrouds itself in mystery and esotericism occupied Clare's thinking as his existential considerations grew darker and more intense. Sensuous apprehensions are less active as Clare demonstrates the most concrete of thinking; what it is to exist as a human being.

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<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 222:178.

<sup>72</sup> <sup>72</sup> Clare, 'I am', *The Later Poems of John Clare*, vol.1, 396-97 (396).

## Chapter Five

### **The Meaning of Existence: Clare as Poetic Thinker**

The ‘linguistic nature of the poetic utterance’<sup>1</sup> illuminates what is made to be manifested within Heidegger’s thinking through the channels of ontology encapsulated in *Dasein*, the existential ontological manifestation of ‘being there.’ The poetic word for Heidegger enquires into the relation of Being to poetry. ‘Language’ says Heidegger ‘is the house of Being’<sup>2</sup> and language is what brings ‘being’ to a knowledge of its existence. Poetry opens up the realm of truth and brings man to the measure of his Being and his world. This, for Heidegger, is the task of the poet. Clare thinks, through the language of Being, about life both as enigma and limitation, as he seeks to make manifest the fullest possibilities of his lived existence.

During Clare’s early and middle poetry, (rather than just the rich pickings of his later asylum poetry), his thoughts become directed inward towards the exigencies of existence. What emerges from this more alert consciousness and darker Clare is a poetics of discontinuity between the poet’s inner world of feeling and his external world, an external world marked by impersonality. This chapter outlines Clare’s attempt to ‘explicitly understand the meaning of Human Being which, is obscure and still unilluminated’<sup>3</sup>, together with Clare’s poetic evaluation of his existential ontological reality.

Throughout his career, Heidegger asked ‘What is the meaning of Being?’ together with the simpler yet more profound question of ‘What does it mean to be?’ Like Heidegger,

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<sup>1</sup> William D. Melanhey, *After Ontology: Literary Theory and Modernist Poetics* (New York: New York State UP, 2001) 32.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘What are Poets For?’ *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 91-142 (132).

<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 25:6.

Clare's 'overwhelming question'<sup>4</sup> 'What is the meaning of life?' is submerged in fundamental ontology. From such a premise, Clare maps all that Heidegger refutes (but gestures towards) in *Letter on Humanism*.<sup>5</sup>

Over the course of three stanzas of an untitled poem (1820-21)<sup>6</sup>, Clare traces the sufferings of the state of *Being-in*. Not too distant from the rhetoric of Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimism<sup>7</sup>, the poem prioritises its referential function which helps to reinforce its overall meaning. Life is something heavy that must be borne. The consequence is disappointment. The poem begins with an account of life's ability to oppress and to sadden:

I urge no muse new terrors to impart  
To load the tender soul with fancyd fears  
To blight the feelings of the mild of heart  
& force from eyes a mockery of tears—  
Few conjuring fancies in my theme appears

(1-5)

The aphoristic quality of the lines ensures that they remain dispassionate even as Clare fervently examines the nature of life. He is appealing to the muses to refrain from causing humans to suffer beyond life's measure of tribulations. Because Clare can find no answer to why life must be full of trials (6), he turns to and upon the muses. Clare urges the muses to not allow 'the tender soul' or 'the mild of heart' to experience the distress and anxiety provided by the human condition. The writing reveals an economy of reflective transactions. The phrase 'new terrors' (1) is particularly distinctive in its description of life's dreadful experiences. The poet's thoughts, revealed in stanza two, present life as a narrative of sad plots and strife. This for Clare, is a primal fact of existence and, according to his existential

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<sup>4</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) 3-7 (3).

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism' in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Routledge: London, 1993) 217-65.

<sup>6</sup> John Clare, *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, 2 vols, (vol.2) eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 488-89.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Studies in Pessimism* (Charleston: Bibliolife, 2009).

deliberations, it represents the ordinary experience of existing after what Heidegger calls *thrownness*.<sup>8</sup> Life is a series of burdens moment by moment. His superficial feelings are easily identifiable when he chooses to depict, arguably, a crueller illustration. He sets up an image of life as unfeeling, causing pain to the 'the tender soul' (2) and 'blight[ing] the feelings of the mild of heart' (2).

Although the poem is largely invested in *Beingness* and *Being-in-the-world*, it does not stray too far from Clare's beloved nature who, in this instance, is also mentioned as experiencing trials:

The trials [that] life and nature undergo  
Two tender lovers born to clouded years

(6-7)

The two subjects that occupy Clare's existence are expressed in one intimate sentiment as lovers. Life is so oblivious to human feeling it hurts the individual and engenders further pain by afflicting what the individual holds dear. The tender lovers, life and nature, are subject to misery and, according to Clare, this is life's main characteristic. 'The clouded years' is the miserable duration of their existences in strife. 'The tender soul' (2) and 'the mild of heart' (3) shed their 'mockery of tears' (4) when life can be summarised according to the sentiments of Clare's short poem 'A Thought' (1849).<sup>9</sup> Nature, too, undergoes trials according to agricultural and ecological contexts. Clare may also be referring to the 'trials' endured by nature caused by enclosure and further modernisations to the land. No relief is to be found in Clare's bleak vision of life. Life is a 'tender tale of unpretending woe' (9).

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<sup>8</sup> See *Glossary*.

<sup>9</sup> Clare, 'A Thought', *The Later Poems*, vol.2, 698. Poem is as follows:

A night without a morning  
A trouble without end  
A life of bitter scorning  
A World without a friend



The second stanza offers an unadorned picture of life as the absence of joy:

I draw no pictures of imagin'd strife  
Fancys deep plots & terrors here are few

...

Who ever cons that motley page may view  
& find those simple tales alas too true

(1-2, 4-5)

The experience of *Being-in-the-world* according to this 'simple story' (3) involves the sober realisation that the life is tainted with enough sadness for tender maids to weep (8-9). Whilst Clare conceives that the general fabric of life is to be 'born to clouded years' (7) his thoughts fail to identify life's meaning. Thus, the last stanza is one of concession and defeat. Here, the poet can only recommend the medium of faith in which to experience some shelter from all that the existential entails. Finding comfort through love after its partner hope flees, (1-3) the individual is advised to be a friend with God in order to have their tears in life dried:

Then be thou faithful & dry up thy tears  
Cease those heart breaking sighs & be thou blest  
God is thy friend o dissipate thy fears

(5-7)

The untitled poem sets out Clare's theory of life in negative terms and its distinguishing principle is to describe Clare's vision of human existence. The poem also awakens, in Clare, 'the need for a more strenuous, difficult, and intellectual apprehension of existence.'<sup>10</sup> The poem 'What is Life?' (1818)<sup>11</sup> is appropriately glossed by Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*'s *thrownness* into Being. It is a reflective anticipation of those poetic elements Heidegger draws upon in *Poetry, Language, Thought* when discussing poetry's relation to ontology. The poem provides a germane demonstration of the Heideggerian disparity between instrumental language and the language of poetry. 'The voice of thought' writes Heidegger 'must be poetic

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1973) 157.

<sup>11</sup> Clare, *Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, vol. 1, 392-93.

because poetry is the saying of truth, the saying of the unconcealedness of being.’<sup>12</sup> ‘What is Life?’ illustrates ‘the nature of language by which thinking is able to say what it thinks.’<sup>13</sup> Poems for Heidegger speak Being in their poetic imaginings and enunciate world and things in their presences. Poetry, he believes, is the very image of life, not merely a literary performance. To understand these principles at work in Clare, a preliminary digression will prove of assistance. The poem ‘A Winter Evening’<sup>14</sup> by Georg Trakl, is an example of a poem that helps to identify Heidegger’s approach to reading poems.

Heidegger’s close readings explore the intimacy that exists between the world, how it opens to things, ‘there beings’ and how they inter-relate with one another. The existential ontological certainties of Georg Trakl’s poem ‘A Winter Evening’<sup>15</sup> provide Heidegger with a poetic exemplar through which to illustrate his dialectic between the beautifully imperfect medium of language and the language of poetry which is ‘purely spoken.’<sup>16</sup> Instrumental language, as a material available to speaking beings with which to shape into communication, lacks the resources to address the profundity of the human condition and, for Heidegger, does not attend to the creation of ontological consciousness. Heidegger sees poetry as a language which speaks Being into and through its own semantic manifestations. Trakl’s three quatrains address the subject of making the things of the world present inside the poem’s space, whilst

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<sup>12</sup> Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 15-88 (72).

<sup>13</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) x.

<sup>14</sup> The date of this poem ‘Ein Winterabend’ (‘A Winter Evening’) edited by Kurt Horwitz is dated 1946 and appears in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 194. The poem is quoted from Georg Trakl, *Die Dichtungen. Gesamtausgabe mit einem Anhang: Zeugnisse und Erinnerungen*, (Zurich: Arche Verlag, 1946).

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 194-95.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger, xiii.

simultaneously addressing the concept of ‘worldhood’<sup>17</sup> and how it makes things possible by ‘wordling.’<sup>18</sup>

Window with falling snow is arrayed,  
Long tolls the vesper bell,  
The house is provided well,  
The table is for many laid.  
Wandering ones, more than a few,  
Come to the door on darksome courses.  
Golden blooms the tree of graces  
Drawing up the earth’s cool dew.  
Wanderer quietly steps within;  
Pain has turned the threshold to stone.  
There lie, in limpid brightness shown,  
Upon the table bread and wine.

The expressive component of the diction transmutes from a poem that ‘speaks’ and ‘calls’ things into Being, to one that calls the abstract and the poetic, as can be seen in the following lines:

Golden blooms the tree of graces  
Drawing up the earth’s cool dew.<sup>19</sup>

For Heidegger, these two lines conjure the poetic by naming, calling, bringing forth an ‘original speaking’, something that does not or cannot pre-exist before consciousness but rather generates it. The world and the ontological consciousness of Clare interpenetrate according to these criteria. He exalts what grieves him and brings into Being what poetry names; his Being and *being-in-the world*. Clare uses that type of thinking which procures ‘truth.’ This is reflective thinking: the ‘essential nature of thinking is determined by what

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Worldhood’ is an ontological concept, and stands for the structure of one of the constitutive items of *Being-in-the-world*. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 92:64.

<sup>18</sup> Heidegger turned this noun into the active verb and generative process of world making. It suggests meanings of the world becoming and giving and already on-going. Worlding is a constructivist process of the ‘thinging’ world. See *Being and Time*, 102: 73-107:76.

<sup>19</sup> Georg Trakl, ‘A Winter Evening’ from *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 194.

there is to be thought about: the presence of what is present, the Being of beings.’<sup>20</sup> Thus, Clare attends to what Heidegger deems significant, using ‘poetry as the place [for] philosophical questioning.’<sup>21</sup> As a poetic thinker, he asks ‘What is Life?’<sup>22</sup> He validates the idea that ‘All truths are matters of thought and .....Philosophy is thinking itself.’<sup>23</sup> In his bid to think through some truths of human Being, as with most concepts which are abstract, Clare does not arrive at a definitive conclusion. The poetic utterances which demonstrate the experience of thinking are what is significant..

Clare’s contemporaries, such as the Romantic poets Shelley, Coleridge and Wordsworth, have also meditated upon this elusive question, arguably in the hope of securing a nexus between ordinariness and its meaning. The poets referred to all fail, like Clare, in their quest to fasten meaning to life or to provide a substantive answer that goes some way to being an acceptable response. All provide a Derridean sense of *différance*<sup>24</sup> by offering alternative devices in figurative exchanges that are poetically charged. Shelley’s poetic thinking on the meaning of life, evidently, cannot be determined by a referral to a selective reading of his poetic œuvre. But what can be perceived from a reading of two of his poems that embrace the ultimate question is a perceived rather than implied knowledge for the need of Utopianism. This utopianism negates the act of lamenting life or endeavouring to

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<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, ‘What is Called Thinking’, Lecture XI Part II 229-244 (244).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2003) 243.

<sup>22</sup> Clare provides some insight into the background of this poem: ‘My prosing thoughts lost themselves in rhyme, in taking a view, as I sat beneath the shelter of a woodland hedge, of my parents’ distresses at home, and of my labouring so hard and so vainly to get out of debt, and of my still added perplexities of ill-timed love. Striving to remedy all, and all to no purpose, I burst out in an exclamation of distress, “What is Life?”’ Quoted from John Clare, *Sketches in the Life of John Clare: Written by Himself*, (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1931) 6.

<sup>23</sup> Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 243.

<sup>24</sup> In his essay ‘Différance’ in *Margins of Philosophy*, Trans. Alan Bass (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982) 1-28, Derrida uses the term as a way of pushing Saussure’s theory of language to its ‘logical’ conclusion (it was Saussure who posited that ‘signs’ in language are arbitrary and deferential), and argues that to differ or to differentiate is also to defer, postpone or withhold. The word itself illustrates Derrida’s point that writing does not copy speech; the distinction between the two different forms *différance* and *difference* does not correspond to any distinction in their spoken form. In his view the process of deferring applies to the written and spoken word: deferral / *différance*. Thus, meaning is continuously and (in theory) endlessly deferred since each word leads the reader on to yet another word in the system of signification.

transcend it. ‘The Triumph of Life’ (1822)<sup>25</sup>, a dream-vision written in terza rima that begins the last verse with the same line as Clare’s enquiry, is exemplary of the senselessness of life under existentially oppressive conditions. The vision presented in the poem is one that envisages a kind of death in life, an erosive zombification that has emanated from unmeaningful circumstances and the mundane ebb and flow of the world. The cruel hegemonic assertion of the disillusionment and futility of life over individual beings and how *everydayness* triumphs over the idealistic identifies the theme of the poem. ‘The Triumph of Life’ focuses this issue primarily through a metamorphosis of images that, in their initial presentation, seem to transcend the mutability of the phenomenal world by offering themselves as analogues of noumenal states (in the Kantian sense) or ultimate reality. The poet’s technique in ‘The Triumph of Life’ is to pursue meaning through images.’<sup>26</sup> But they prove to be destructive in their self-destructiveness ‘since they make distinctions only to blur their relevance as explanations.’<sup>27</sup>

By intentionally laying bare the presence of the poem’s self-conscious mode, Shelley undermines the philosophical significance he had previously deposited within his images with the revelation of their inadequacies as a simulacrum of the eternal by submerging them into phenomenal flux. This can be seen for example in the triple use of the shadow and sun motif. Over the course of lines 41-92 which contain Shelley’s description of the highway and concludes with Rousseau’s description of the captives, three strata of references can be identified. First, there is the true sun (292) which is obfuscated by the shades of dogma. Then there are the shades themselves which bear a correlation with seasonal images. Finally, there is the ‘morn of truth’ (214) which is feigned by various dogmatists.

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<sup>25</sup> Poem was published in 1824 after Shelley’s death. Quoted from *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works including Poetry, Prose and Drama*, eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) 604-21. Hereafter, Leader and O’Neill.

<sup>26</sup> Michael O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley’s Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 180.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

The poem's initial suggestion that relevance and a sense of 'real' meaning can be attained ('the Sun sprang forth / Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask / Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth (2-4)'<sup>28</sup> is eventually thrown into doubt since the 'freeness' of individuals has been curtailed by the 'triumph' or masquerade that belongs to the cruel Chariot of Life. Life appears to vanquish the hope and ideals of all men, dragging in its train even the greatest like Plato, Alexander, or Napoleon. Only the 'sacred few' like Jesus and Socrates, who 'Fled back like eagles to their native noon (131)', escape compromise and captivity. Hence, via Shelley's importing and exporting of meaning into his images, we gain no further ground to answer the question 'What is Life? But through ontological and epistemological certainties and uncertainties, what can be known is life has a binary nature; it either corrupts or it destroys.

Shelley's 'Alastor; Or, The Spirit of Solitude' (1816)<sup>29</sup> reveals similar philosophical affinities with 'The Triumph of Life.' In its approach, it depicts a different type of Shelleyan thinking by which to respond to the question 'What is life?' The wandering Poet's solipsistic quest to transcend discontent with human limitations, the horrors of the familiarity of the world, and the obsolescence of its experiences, presents discordance with the passive but subtly bitter ruminations Clare reveals in his enquiry. Using the same medium of dream vision, Shelley presents in a tragic light the Poet's desire for a reality in a supernatural world where [his] 'union with the self's ideal reflection'<sup>30</sup> can be realised. This world lies within the perceptions of the reality of the natural world; and the natural world will preclude any achievement that seeks the highest purpose. The Poet's extreme idealism and unfulfilled and empty spirit will ultimately be satiated, but he perishes through the intensity of his desire and the fleeting images 'Of this so lovely world!' (686). He sleeps with nature's sublime images upon his eyes, and leaves 'Those who remain behind' (716) such as Clare, a figure who [has],

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<sup>28</sup> Leader and O'Neill, 604.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-111.

<sup>30</sup> William Keach, Shelley's *Style* (New York: Methuen, 1984) 82.

in Shelley's words, 'everywhere sought, and ha[s] found only repulse and disappointment'<sup>31</sup> in 'The passionate tumult of a clinging hope,' (717) translated as 'pale despair and cold tranquillity (718).'<sup>32</sup> It seems that Shelley cannot solve the riddle of existence. However, what he does achieve is to be found in his approach. Through his two poems, Shelley demonstrates that it is more important to explore and understand than to attain.

The poetic voice converging with the poetry of existence is also exemplified in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's version of 'What is Life?' (1804).<sup>33</sup> Like Clare, Coleridge exemplifies his 'Theory of Life' by making comparisons with what helps life to become manifest. 'All colors of all shade...' (4) penetrate the 'encroach[ing] darkness' (5) and aid the bringing into presence of life (because 'It may be too simple in itself for human sight' (2). Although the poem's sentiments deflect the answer to what is life, from the octet, it expresses a most evident truth. The 'war-embrace of wrestling life and death' (8)<sup>34</sup> will always have the same outcome since death will always be the inevitable victor. The poem initially addresses the question by way of comparing life to 'what was once held of Light' (1) rather than employing a focused interrogative. Coleridge's image of light that is now spent responds to the poem's own questioning and appears to be commenting on the fall of life from previous heights. Its subsequent becoming a paragon of ordinariness has pathos. If life is reducible to anything, it is its own resemblances and relations.

The approach to the meaning of life according to the Wordsworthian philosophical vision in his *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and in 'Tintern Abbey' (1798), is to appeal to the ordinary life to seek continuous animation from within ordinary experiences that are otherwise dead, unattended to and insignificant. Besides the central showings of 'a

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<sup>31</sup> Shelley, 'On Love', Leader and O'Neill, 631-33 (631).

<sup>32</sup> Leader and O'Neill, 111.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (London: Penguin, 1987) 330.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 330.

consciousness that shares dogmatism, morality and nomadism'<sup>35</sup>, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour July 13, 1798' shows an ostensible concern with what is the meaning of life in time. Wordsworth confronts the question that all come to ask at some point, in the same indirect address as his contemporaries. But he refrains from any elaborated formulations in favor of a didactic, even homiletic tone that is calm in its appeal to the individual to avoid the death in life experience. That the significance of life is on the poet's mind is suggested in the thought that 'Five years have passed; five summers, with the length / Of five long winters!'(1-2).<sup>36</sup> What has filled and what should fill the passing of time? The fertility of this scene lies in the awareness of oneself as observing and thinking about the possible or rather hoped for future occurrences in life that will bring assurances of meaningfulness.

The directedness of Clare's questioning in his poem 'What is Life?' initially appears to provide the promise of achieving the elusive meaning that had so adeptly evaded the other Romantic poets. But Clare soon discovers that to account for life is one thing, to explain life is wholly another. In its constant making and remaking of the question and despite all its talk of life, Clare's poem is equivocal and demonstrates the impossibility of answering this question. Clare, like his poetic contemporaries, leans on compensatory mechanisms such as accumulated perceptions and metaphorical comparisons rather than the solidity of definitions to discuss rather than say what is life. Clare's 1818 poem 'Life's Likenesses'<sup>37</sup> dramatises a similar process of inquiry into the meaning of life. It achieves its poetic presence from a withdrawn calculability whilst aestheticising the central question which results in the repetition of definitions that deflect from definitive explanations. In repetitive mode, Clare asks 'Life is—what?' (1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 36, 43, 50), which is followed by a series of

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Eldridge, 'Wordsworth and the Life of a Subject.' *The Meaning of "Life" in Romantic Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Ross Wilson (London: Routledge, 2009) 57-80 (68).

<sup>36</sup> William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, The Oxford Authors, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984) 131-35 (131).

<sup>37</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1, 394-95.



metaphorical rhyming couplets that moves meaning from factualness to the imaginative. 'Life is.../...the shooting of a star' (2), '...the vermeil of the rose' (9), '...a dew drop of the morn' (16), 'A stone, whose fall doth circles make' (23), '...a bubble on the main' (30), 'A shadow on the mountain's side' (37), '...the sound of the cannon near' (44). Life is also 'the shallow's sojournment' (51) but what life is not, is an enigma revealed. The unsaid remains unsaid, but what is articulated disperses meaning from the question and Clare is unable to move his inquiry from the aesthetic to the crispness of a defined interpretation. The poem does gesture towards providing some meaning about life. However, Clare's responses amount to a series of beautifully thought-provoking deviations. His intellectual thinking remains intact, however; the meaning of life remains elusive.

From a milieu of frustration, despair and a pathetic acceptance of life's potent effectiveness to crush the individual spirit, what Clare does achieve is a cogent mapping of the existential dimension of 'where-you-are-at-ness.' It is as if the existentialist / modernist / humanist's cry of 'What is the significance of existence?' has defied time, regressed and enthused precociously into the ontological sensory notions of Clare, and moved him to utterance. The creation of the tension between sympathy and melancholia issues as a pathos-inducing pointlessness.

Returning to the poem 'What is Life?', it continues to show life for Clare that life seems to mean the realisation of ordinary expectations. But even the rudimentary is being denied by 'universal plagues' (19). 'What is Life?' begins a thought that lays bare the poet's existential discernment. Stripped of tranquility of mind, Clare reaches out to life, asking it to matter. This leads ultimately to an acceptance that fulfilment and contentment are only available in a religious solution (33).

Even though the reader reads Clare from the mode of the poet absorbed in his own thoughts, the performance of the words never loses contact with the lived world of the poet

and the means by which the reader is engaged. The opening line of the poem, ‘& what is Life?—an hour glass on the run’, establishes the questioning reflective voice of the existential interpreter and the two (words and world) become integrated and are inseparable. From the outset, the conceptions of existence, and of the negativity of the human condition, as well as intimations of death and the after-life are spoken through an ontological consciousness that articulates an ironic reversal of fortune in which the self is not condemned to death, but to life. Life is an unprofitable episode that disturbs the peace of non-existence (27). This may provide the reason as to why Clare does not set the poem between two poles of possibility: happiness and a sense of contentment, or a state in which all traces of optimism are vanquished. He chooses to focus on existence’s dark, malfunctioning and sad aspects. From this premise, the poem journeys through a series of philosophical questions that after each stanza produce a disconcerting set of thoughts.

The predominant thrust behind Clare’s negativity concerns the concept of ‘lack’. His reflective ‘sentimentality’ relates what is absent in the present, what will be absent in the future and what will be absent throughout.. What can be safely assumed is that in responding to his own question of what is life, Clare is certain that all that life contains is bare and at best, disappointing. But unlike the Poet in ‘Alastor’ who seeks the positive fulfilment of his existential questions through fulfilment of his own transcendental yearnings, Clare seeks happiness through freedom from the torment of care and anxiety. All four verses begin with an interrogative: ‘& what is Life?’ (1), ‘Vain hopes what are they?’ (7), ‘& what is death?’ (21) with the exception of the third stanza in which trouble is spoken to in a confrontational address. Stanza one speaks about the strange inability of life to be grasped in lines that confront the challenge of temporality:

& what is Life?—an hour glass on the run  
A mist retreating from the morning sun

A busy bustling still repeated dream  
—Its Length? —A minutes pause—a moments thought  
& happiness? —A Bubble on the stream  
That in the act of seizing shrinks to nought—

(1-6)

Time dictates all life's events. It moves existence along at such a brisk pace that the standard three-score years and ten become undifferentiated from the 'minute's pause' or the 'moment's thought' (4). Time oppresses the individual and causes angst with its ever present burden. 'What is Life?' is a sustained reminder that life predetermines Being within a time that is not timeless. Therefore, the image of the hour glass on the run suggests that life is measured even as we exist always in it. The ever-fleeting present is itself subverted by the immediacy of the future. Clare's dense figuration of time is interrupted almost immediately by the second sentence:

A mist retreating from the morning sun

This line dramatises an imbalance between the fragility of existence and the ability of fate to terminate human actuality. Life is time forever ticking, but it is also a flimsy mist whose agenda is to sequester itself from the dominant power of the morning sun. The mist, a working metaphor for life, 'retreats from the morning sun', a symbol of all those entities that are only able to speak of life as the sum of its own parts, so that it might protect its mysteries a little while longer. Embedded in the binary exchange between ideas of delicateness and omnipotence, Clare also brings to mind the timeless images of sunrise and sunset that function as symbols of birth and death.

Clare is also interested in the abstract concept of happiness. The potency of the penultimate and last lines of stanza one manages to convey Clare's 'lack' of happiness and the depth of his resignation to suffering:

And Happiness?—A Bubble on the stream  
That in the act of seizing shrinks to naught—

(5-6)

The lines compose a treatise in little on happiness. Happiness does not belong to one context; it has many according to cultural diversities within different realms. Clare, however, reduces the flux of definitions and provides a stratum of human commonality. Happiness is a state that holds the potential to not being attained. It is like ‘A Bubble on the stream’ (5). Bubbles are globules of one substance encased in another, usually air in a liquid. They are renowned for their miniscule weight and longevity that is based on seconds. Yet, liquid bubbles because of vapour pressure tend to be numerous in nature. Clare’s image of a solitary bubble on the stream expresses happiness’s inability to be apprehended. Happiness for Clare, is something to watch appear and disappear since the action of the stream will infinitely destroy the momentary happiness the bubble represents. The bubble may remain intact when it reaches the surface of the immersive substance, but Clare from his experiences, is fully aware of its transience because for him, misfortune in general is the norm. It is not that happiness is scarce; it is simply unattainable. ‘In the act of seizing [happiness] shrinks to naught’ (6). The trouble he speaks of in stanza three will ‘shrink’ and undermine the prospect of happiness because of the trials trouble brings on a daily basis. Even if happiness could be grasped, in the end it adds nothing, changes nothing and concludes, as nothing (6).

The caustic texture of Clare’s diction in the first line of the second stanza —‘Vain hopes what are they?— Puffing gales of morn’, presents an account that enhances the unsettled and bleak perceptions of the Being of reality. The line operates as it were centripetally, specifying meaning in a language that is declarative in emphasis. The sentences bespeak a flight from hope since it has disappeared into a terrain of hopelessness. The existential vigour of the second stanza gives power to Clare’s vision of the human soul

struggling to live on in life. To hope for anything is to actively define pointlessness. Hope and hopes are 'vain' (7). On this occasion it is the 'The puffing gale of morn' (7) instead of the 'morning sun' (2) that poses danger and the potential to destroy. That Clare uses nature as a semiotic code for something to be feared is an unusual move for the nature poet who viewed nature as a measure of his own Being. But for Clare, the burden of existence is perhaps well suited for comparisons to nature. He knows that they are both capricious, both have their own 'truths' and they are inexplicable.

The lines 'The puffing gale of morn / That of its charms divests the dewy lawn' (7-8) returns to this idea of nakedness or lack. But, in stanza two, it is accompanied by a violence which is sub-textual and presents two very different kinds of visual perceptions. 'The puffing gale of morn' undresses or strips the 'dewy lawn' (8) of its charms, leaving a state of nothingness. It then proceeds to 'rob each flow'ret of its gem' which stylistically resonates with the stanza's theme of bareness. However, it also evokes through the use of 'flowret' and 'gem', any attempt by hope to sprout or form as 'vain.' Life will act like frost and wither it to non-existence. The violence of robbing fully illuminates Clare's emotions of defeat and privation.

Clare's 'hopeless' rationale has much in common with the thinking expressed by Sartre in *Existentialism and Humanism*.<sup>38</sup> For Sartre, the only hope the individual must seek to gain is the hope of self-autonomy based on what they are able to control. The individual must despair of any hope which has external value because it stands in contrast with the hope that one must create for oneself. In a voice that anticipates Sartre's existentialism, Clare places value on something that enables action. He takes responsibility for his existence by accepting that his reality alone is dependent upon his actions, not one's hopes and dreams.

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, Trans. Phillip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1948).

Clare's cataloguing of his involuntary struggle with hopes expected and hopes dashed is familiar in his poetry. Examples include five poems from his earlier work: 'To Hope' (1808-19), 'On Hope' (1808-19), 'To Hope' (1817), 'To Hope' (*In a Melancholy Hour*, 1819), and 'Hope' (1820-1). 'To Hope' (1808-19) captures the early dreams of a poet who still believes in and subscribes to hope:

For O in every grief we find  
Her ready aid to cheer the mind

(5-6)<sup>39</sup>

But 'To Hope' (*In a Melancholy Hour*)<sup>40</sup> shifts from the view that 'Sweet hope endears the wisht essay' in 'To Hope' (18) to apprehensive waiting. 'To Hope' (*In a Melancholy Hour*) substantiates the change:

Come flattering hope now woes distress me (1)  
Still must I rest on thee for better (7)

However, 'On Hope'<sup>41</sup> and 'Hope'<sup>42</sup> throb with the passion of delusiveness. Clare's equivalent in 'Hope' reads as 'This world has suns but they are overcast' (1). 'Hope' haunts the reader with its intense longing that almost invites an element of the tragic:

I long have hopd & still shall hope the best  
Till heedless weeds are scrambling over me

(11-12)

'On Hope' duplicates this longing but in this poem, it is tinted with a spirit of anguish:

When disappointments vex & fether  
& tells me hope thy cordials vain  
Still must I rest on thee for better  
Still live—& be deceived again  
I cant but listen to thy p[r]attle  
I still must hug thee to my breast

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<sup>39</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1, 61.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 531.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>42</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.2, 493.

& like a child that's lost its Rattle  
Without my toy I cannot rest

(5-12)

Clare's emotions shift once more, here to a steadfast refusal to believe in hope any longer. In 'To Hope'<sup>43</sup> he relinquishes his expectations and his agony, and hope can no longer redeem itself to Clare. 'No more shall you this aching heart beguile / No more your fleeting joys will I pursue' (6-7), affirms his 'apostasy.' Toneless and flat, ironically, the writing energises the effectiveness of Clare's conviction in 'What is Life?' that hope is but a simulacrum of hope. (7) The last two sentences of 'To Hope' enact the resignation he feels in all the hope poems except in the 1808 poem 'To Hope.' 'By whispering joys I never can possess / & painting scenes that never must be mine' (12-13) are sentences that connect with the despondency he feels in 'What is Life?'

Returning to the poem 'What is Life?' Clare still insists that life is just a journey from hopelessness to disappointment. The line 'A Cobweb hiding disappointments thorn', (10) offers a duality of meanings. First, cobwebs conjure up images of time that has elapsed which allowed the silky fibres to form in the first instance. Secondly, cobwebs are structures that by nature do not conceal what lies behind them because of their translucence. The use of time by Clare suggests that disappointment is intrinsic to time; in other words, disappointment is *in* the passing of time that ticks days into years. The central message that Clare wants to convey comes through the verb 'to hide' in the participle form of the present continuous. The 'ing' morpheme creates a distinct impression that disappointment is an ongoing event and is as natural to life as life is to itself. The poet's use of the word 'cobweb' deserves some attention since it manages to perform a connotative role in Clare's version of Being and *Being-in*. Clare equates hope to a cobweb. It has already been established that hope is 'vain (2.1)' and

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<sup>43</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1, 416-17.

as flimsy as happiness. But the word cobweb also signals a return to the already established allegorical content found in stanza one. In its calm didacticism, stanza one communicates the idea of pointless striving because impossibility is always the knowable outcome generated from a basis of the inevitable. We only have to wait until the next sentence to learn further that disappointment also has a ‘thorn’ that ‘stings more keenly through the thin disguise’ (11). The cobweb is compared to hope, and like happiness, it thinly veils life’s disappointments. It cannot hide or shield the individual from the ravages of cyclical hoping and then being disappointed.

Clare’s perspective on ‘What is Life?’ lucidly demonstrates its antithesis to Shelley’s conviction that ‘there is a spirit within him [the individual] at enmity with nothingness and dissolution, change and extinction.’<sup>44</sup> In his short prose piece ‘On Life’<sup>45</sup> Shelley advocates that this is ‘the character of all life and being.’<sup>46</sup> But Shelley’s philosophical theorem falls flat within a Clarean context, because Clare does not fight to upstage the mundaneness of life or to distinguish his life from the quagmires of repetitive existential demands. From the idiomatic remarks of this poem, he merely resorts to a series of methodological questioning and answering that comes to the conclusion human Being has no point.

Stanza three continues the characteristic subservience to the omnipotence of the human condition as it provides an occasion whereby Clare is able to question the presence and purpose of the torment suffering brings. Clare treats trouble like a god figure, and does not reconcile his murmurings against divinity like some of the Metaphysical poets such as George Herbert or Henry Vaughan. Unlike the reflective treatment life and hope receive in the first and second stanzas, trouble is addressed forthrightly. Clare’s words are made to feel personal, creating the impression that a relationship exists between the poet and the noun ‘trouble’, albeit a relationship flawed by its inequality. Trouble’s constant presence has

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<sup>44</sup> Leader and O’Neill, 634.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 633-36.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 634.



earned it the salutation 'thou.' This continues the mood of familiarity with the 'And' connective at the beginning which intimates the continuation of a conversation.

Throughout the nine lines which parenthetically mark the longest stanza of the poem, Clare's tone veers once more to accommodate a sardonic voice that articulates life's generosity in allocating individuals their portion of trouble. Over the first three lines, Clare's enquiry into the ontological purpose of trouble is one of borderline incredulity:

—& thou o Trouble—nothing can suppose  
(& sure the power of wisdom only knows)  
—What need requireth thee  
(12-14)

Why does trouble exist within human experience? There is nothing to explain it except 'the power of wisdom' (13) which is able to break the stalemate of ineffability with a knowledge that exceeds human boundaries. The implication here is that the knowledge that belongs to the power of wisdom is able to know the answer to an impossible question, but cannot transcend its own esotericism and morph into something the individual is able to access. Therefore, in cyclical fashion, we are reminded of the poem's intention to present the idea of 'lack.' Because Clare is unable to answer his own enquiry, he turns to sarcasm voicing frustration and a controlled bitterness:

So free & liberal as thy bounty flows,  
(15)

Hope and happiness are unavailable commodities but, ironically, trouble is freely available without the individual hoping, wanting or even working towards obtaining it. In a process of inversion, Clare replaces the abstract concept of non-existence with something that is ontic (something that is there) and, 'So free & liberal...., [it] flows' (15).

Clare's change in tone makes for a lively and original way of presenting the idea of existence bringing its trials. His technique here also reflects the lack of the figurative. Clare wants to position this stanza in raw reality which he achieves by not creating numerous metaphorical instances. The discourse is steeped in what Heidegger refers to as *everydayness*. *Everydayness* is interpreted as that way of existing in which *Dasein* maintains itself 'every day.' Heidegger writes, 'But what we have primarily in mind in the expression of *everydayness* is a definite 'how' of existence by which *Dasein* is dominated through and through 'for life.'<sup>47</sup> Being firmly rooted within the human condition dictates that 'Disappointments, pains, and every woe' (17) will be a part of the experience. The individual is dominated by life. Clare does not seem to want to argue against the mastery of such certitude, his concern issues in the timeless question of why and to what purpose does suffering have to exist. He is convinced a reason exists:

Some necessary cause must surely be

(16)

But similarly to Job who is not told by God why he suffers, Clare, like all thinkers, can only consider the problematic and painful relationship between the individual and the endurance of suffering.

It is interesting that the line 'Adopted wretches feeld' (18), is the shortest syntactically and syllabically. And yet, it implies far more than its brief construction allows. It speaks of something that is more potent than misfortune. It speaks of being 'dominated through and through for life.'<sup>48</sup> The individual cannot participate in and not belong within human existence. The word 'Adopted' (18) is illustrative of this idea and signifies an active

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<sup>47</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), Trans. of *Sein und Zeit*, 1927, 422:370.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

interchange between the Heideggerian concept of facticity<sup>49</sup> or *thrownness*, and Clare's dark declarative (18). Individuals find themselves *thrown* and existing in a world not of their own making and indifferent to their concerns. They are not the source of their existence, but find themselves *thrown* into a world they did not choose but are existentially 'Adopted' into it.

The elliptical construction helps to register the independence of the sentence, but this is true only in the interim or rather, until the arrival of the next sentence whereby influence rescinds the fleeting presence of independence. 'Adopted wretches feel'd' can no longer be read as individuals that are able to transcend the 'pains & and every woe' (17) of life. The inclusion of the next sentence acknowledges a consignment to 'The universal plagues of life below.' The meaning of this sentence is clear; all who have been *thrown* are subject to the ills of life.

The use of the phrase 'universal plagues' (29) inaugurates Clare's intermittent and fragmentary parallels to the Bible in this stanza, and in the stanzas which follow. The imagery that emanates from the word 'plagues' generates references to either the Egyptian plagues pre-exodus, or more probably the seven eschatological plagues in the book of Revelation. Clare's use of the word 'universal' (19) seems to provide the definitive answer. The Egyptian plagues were localised to the people of Egypt. Therefore, Clare's biblical connotation must be a reference to the plagues in the book of Revelation in which all shall be exasperated by afflictions that are destructive and grievous. What should also be noted is the word 'below.' It reveals Clare's belief in the idea of a physical place above the earth that is not touched by universal plagues. This place that is free from trouble is also mentioned as the balm to the sorrow of life in the ultimate sentence of the poem. The 'skyes' are the only place where the individual may be released from the unrest of existence. Suffering then is

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<sup>49</sup> When Heidegger discusses facticity, it is in the context of *Geworfenheit* or *Thrownness*. When Sartre refers to this word, he is signifying the social background against which human freedom exists such as the environment, place of birth and the type of language that is spoken. Hence, Sartre's intended meaning could be described as 'factualness.'

something that will be experienced at the beginning, during or at the end of life and is also an interchangeable synonym with life.

The mysteries of the ‘universal plagues’ conclude the stanza’s inquisitive drive. However, his momentary excursions into the realms of Christian dogma open up another thought in his philosophical thinking and refigure in his allusion to the doctrine of predestination:

Fate hides them all—& keeps their cause consceald

(20)

For Clare, fate is foreordained by God and not by any system based on univocal or equivocal freedom.<sup>50</sup> Like the power of wisdom, fate is silent towards its nature and towards humanity. It is a prophetic seer but it cannot be accessed by humanity. The gloominess of the poem needs to serve as a caution, however, that Clare’s poetic representation of the doctrine of determinism or predestination may or may not be a reflection of his own belief system. In the mode of frustrated poet who can obtain no answers, Clare constructs his immediate reality out of theological ideas of which he is conscious together with personal psychological truths.

The subject of death receives brief treatment from Clare as he continues to be overwhelmed by questions that have no representative voice. Paradoxically, when Clare asks ‘& what is death?—Is still the cause unfound’ (21) on this occasion, he will not be met by silence because he is already in receipt of the answer. Clare is fully aware of the individual’s relationship to temporality and the threat (to speak like Heidegger) to their ‘possibility [by their] ‘absolute impossibility.’<sup>51</sup> It is the oppositional symmetry between the following lines:

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<sup>50</sup> The univocal conception of freedom holds that human will is free of cause, even though it characteristically shows dependence on the Creator. This belief system holds that the Creator has fashioned a system of absolute freedom that features a free and independent nature. On the other end of the spectrum, is the equivocal position that the Creator exercises absolute control over human will and / or that all decisions originate with some outside cause, leaving no room for freedom.

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294: 251.

That dark mysterious name of horrid sound  
—A long & lingering Sleep the weary crave—

(22-23)

-- that dramatises the Clarean view of death. In the first instance it is 'dark' and has a 'mysterious name of horrid sound' (22). Death from an established moral certainty together with Clare's adjectives of 'mysterious' and 'horrid' is an act that is to be feared. The next sentence, however, neutralises the cumulative trepidation that has been built up as Clare transforms death into something that the individual should welcome. Death now becomes '—A long & lingering Sleep...' (23) where the effects of trouble will be ineffectual. The acoustic stress on the words 'long' and 'lingering' orchestrates a mood of desire as Clare concludes that 'the weary crave—' (23) death.

The whereabouts of peace becomes the stanza's concern after the reformulation of death as an attractive prospect:

& peace!—Where can its happiness abound

(24)

Clare immediately states that peace is 'No where at all But heaven, & the— Grave' (25). The deflationary feeling is still a part of the poem's pessimistic vision as peace joins happiness and hope in being unattainable. Yet, unlike the latter states, peace exists, but it exists outside of the mortal sphere. The individual will have to be dead and have a belief in the after-life before peace from the angst that existence brings can be experienced.

The last stanza sees Clare concluding his question of 'What is Life?' with a repetition of the question in pensive mode:

Then what is Life?—

(26)

The conclusion he seems to arrive at regarding life, is that it is an event that should not take place. It is ugly, miserable, vain and a pointless infliction. His conviction shows more than a consistency with Schopenhauer's pessimism, it is mimetic at every point:

When stripp'd of its disguise  
A thing to be desir'd it cannot be

(26-27)

Returning to a religious theme and utilising the style of the homily, Clare didactically affirms that the location and attainment of happiness is 'in the skyes' (33). The underlying idea here is that one must know the God who bestows happiness upon 'vain man' (32). Happiness is tantamount to grace, or forgiveness or any other of the Christian traits. They cannot be obtained, they must be given or 'claimed' (33). Until then, life remains 'a trial' (30) that exists only to teach humanity about the importance of what lies outside happiness. The poem ends with a total negation of optimism but affirms that the individual must live on in the human struggle without an obvious benevolent purpose and hope in vain that something that is relevant and personal can be claimed in the skies (33).

The sonnet 'Life' (1819-20)<sup>52</sup> extends Clare's contemplation of human Being in a continuation of the thematic exposition of *being-there*. Moving away from the sometimes abstract and objective line of inquiry presented in 'What is Life?', Clare commits himself to a highly subjective mode which evokes an absence of imaginative devices. The absence of any external and functional images points to Clare continuing to write as a reflective agent but limiting the poem to an almost solipsistic consciousness. Centrally, the poem is declarative,

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<sup>52</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.2, 316.

cynically despondent and pathetic, haunting the reader with its existential dolour over the flow of the rhyming couplets. The orchestration of 'Life' demonstrates not that Clare detests life, but that he is acknowledging his desire for a better one. As early as line four he confronts his existential situation as it really is. In a Sartrean sense, he abandons the world's coverings to discover the truth about life. Life for Clare, from the proposition of this quasi sonnet, is tantamount to misery:

Life thou art misery or as such to me  
One name serves both or I no difference see

(1-2)

Technically, the structure of the poem reads as one written in the Petrarchan form. The correlation between Clare's poem and the Petrarchan sonnet is the state of unrequitedness. There is more than an ephemeral resemblance to the Petrarchan concept of unattainable love. This 'love' does not correspond to the conventional or rather established notion of *eros*. Rather, a continual longing whereby Clare does not address a beautiful lady in hyperbolic terms, but expresses the desire that the longing for the 'irksome[ness]' (11) of life should dissipate proves to be its subject. From the general sentiments expressed by the poem, Clare has attempted to participate in life and the opportunities it affords. But from the twist of irony we receive in the line:

But thats a nick name I've not learnd to know

(4)

it is possible to arrive at the idea that life has not capitalised on his willingness and has given rise to his living life as a 'not-self.'

'Life' also resembles a Petrarchan sonnet in the flow of its structure. Clare's first eight lines fulfil the purposes of the Petrarchan octave. Clare's octave introduces a problem,

expresses a desire, reflects on reality, or otherwise, presents a situation that causes doubt or conflict within the speaker:

Where even usless stones beneath his feet  
Cannot be gathe[r]d up to say theyre mine  
Sees little heaven in a life like thine

(6-8)

The problem or conflict Clare speaks of is far removed from the pointlessness and the hopelessness he is troubled by in 'What is Life?' The existential misery he is experiencing because of 'poverty & pains replete' (5), occupies the space and purpose of the octave. Nothing is his, and a life experiencing nothingness cannot easily anticipate any joy that is able to be reflected in the Christian heaven (3). The sestet provides some measure of interruption to the poem's resemblance to the Petrarchan form at the beginning of the volta. Its pronounced change in tone does not make a comment on the problem, nor does it apply a solution to it. The poem continues to lament.

It seems to be no coincidence that 'Life' can be discussed in the context of the duality of the Petrarchan sonnet form. Abhorrence of life, followed by a heterodox acceptance of death, are brought into an economy of organic unity. Yet, what transforms the poem is its anticipation of the existential rationale that life means nothing and there must be something else:

O that my soul death's dreary vale has past  
& met the sunshine of a better day

(13-14)

Life's existential onerousness cannot mitigate the poet's feelings of continual becoming without ever being. Clare considers questions that involve issues of self and agency,



summoning the reader's attention to the existential enormity of the will to live which at times, must battle against the vanity of its own striving.

Again our attention becomes attuned to Clare's preoccupation with hope which he represents as a thing that is synonymous with lack (9). Hope is a useless existential tool. It seduces the individual into its promises of 'no lack' but is itself found lacking:

Hope lends a sorry shelter from thy storms  
& largely promises but small performs

(9-10)

Clare recognises the ultimate futility of desire and this recognition becomes the decisive factor in his freedom to no longer actively 'choose' in a Sartrean sense. The absolute concept of choice has been rescinded because having only misery as a choice, makes choice, no choice at all. To read this poem, with its references to metaphysical weariness and its existential redundancy, is to recognize its affinities with Sartre's ideas on bad faith and Heidegger's analysis of the non-reality of existence's possibilities. Clare's articulation of his feeling that life is the exemplar of awfulness reveals an inauthentic relationship with the world. For Sartre, Clare is demonstrating *bad faith* by not utilising his inescapable freedom to choose. In Sartrean terms, Clare has assumed the role of an object in the world merely at the mercy of circumstances and reducing his existence to a *being-in-itself* that only exists in its own facticity. Clare as an individual must choose, but he must choose in *anguish*, that is to say, he must choose himself towards something in the knowledge that it bears consequences. However, Clare only 'wishes' for death rather than chooses the prospect of death. 'This weary breath feign sighs for is decay;' (12) is a bid to bring his misery to an end. But if one rejects life, only two alternatives remain death, or existential nothingness.

Heidegger has referred to the intersubjective relationship in dread. When individuals decide to confront the non-reality of their possibilities, their understanding of this nothingness leads them to choose the only unconditioned and insurmountable possibility that belongs to them, death. This is a certain possibility because ‘the sunshine of a better day’ (14) seems to be located in the domain of the inaccessible. To choose to be face to face with the possible nullity of one’s own being, according to Sartre, is to live inauthentically. For Heidegger, however, to choose *thanatos*, (the death drive) is to fulfil *resoluteness*, an existentials of authenticity.<sup>53</sup>

The poem epitomizes the existential *everydayness* Clare records in his efforts to engage with the human condition and its enigma. It is precisely in their insistence upon the individuality of the life of each individual that Heidegger and Clare converge. However, Heidegger does not attend to *Dasein*’s humanness and its existential vicissitudes. Whilst Heidegger is concerned with the spatiality, temporality and authenticity of *Dasein* from an ontological perspective, Clare demonstrates his concern and attendance to *Dasein*’s existential encounters which are indispensable to the human condition. Fear, the unexpected and existential apprehension are three elements Heidegger discusses. However, they are discussed from within a context of ontology. These traits of human Being are taken out of their theoretical frameworks and allocated a sense of existential reality by Clare.

Walking home through the woods late on a dark night Clare, if we borrow from Psalms 23, walks ‘through the valley of the shadow of death.’<sup>54</sup> But unlike the Psalmist who is peacefully assured that a guide is beside him, Clare travels alone through the canopy of

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<sup>53</sup> The word *existentiell* is used by Heidegger in *Being and Time* to describe an ontic understanding of beings in the world. An *existentiell* understanding addresses the facts about things in the context of the world, in terms of their existence, but differs from the ontological understanding. The latter is reached by going about our daily business, interacting with things in the world, whereas existential understanding is theoretical and ontological in character. Thus, *Authenticity* is connected with *Dasein* and describes an ontological mood, a way to be in the world when *Dasein* is comporting itself towards its own ontological possibilities outside of *The They*.

<sup>54</sup> *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*, King James Version with Apocrypha, ed. David Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) Psalms 23 v1-6 (4).

silence and the fright-inducing darkness of the woods. ‘Verses On Midnight Made During A Journey’ (1819-20)<sup>55</sup> contemplates the dread of being thrown into an existentially capricious world. The motif of the existential journey is audible from the beginning of the poem to its end. The pervasive darkness suggests the individual’s need to search for and journey towards the true self. ‘Travelling glow worms with their lanterns / Twinkling their circling rays of glimmering light (7: 2-3)’ is the hoped for image that would ‘sooth’ (7:1) Clare as he ‘treads [The] wild wood[’s]’<sup>56</sup> dismal gloom (1: 4-5).’ The glow worms have the potential to penetrate ‘the darkness thro the wild woods spread (3:1)’ and provide some potential illumination. Nevertheless, on a symbolic and existential premise, they point to an inadequate simulacrum of a guiding light to the individual fumbling and grappling with *thrownness*.

The idea of anxiety and bewilderment becomes personified in an episode of existential awakening. The human condition and poetry’s connection to consciousness are held together in this poem through a creative act of existential ontological acknowledgement. ‘Verses On Midnight Made During A Journey’ breathes new life into a classical universal experience as its poetry reciprocates and reconstructs the times of wakefulness, when the presence of dread has dominion over the real.

Interestingly, the wakefulness the poem speaks of is not confined only to Clare’s eyes and active mind. The poem is also awake to its own ontology. How it exists comes to the fore through its intelligibility of shared practices. ‘Verses On Midnight Made During A Journey’ seems conscious of its efforts to build up a unified structure. But how Clare achieves this, is something to be discussed. The poem is highly artificial because it is unsure of its own purposes. In terms of its style, the poem could be received as a dream poem from an imagined consciousness. In terms of its exposition, the poem performs as formless autobiography, but in terms of its structure, the poem allows its syntactical flow to be guided

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<sup>55</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1. 448-50. Date given by Robinson and Powell as 1819-20. This poem seems to be the more polished version of a poem entitled ‘Midnight’ which appears in this volume, 445-48.

<sup>56</sup> Punctuation is my insertion.

by the presence of an imaginative impulse which forces it to perform outside a sense of a reference point. This absence of clarity paradoxically engenders the idea of an imperceptible structure: imperceptible because of its willingness to court heterogenic constituents and embrace ambiguity.

The poem embraces its concessions to recognised styles, one of which is the Gothic. The presence of dark Romanticism (that is most prominent in verses 9 and 10) within the poem lends itself to the systematic presentation of independent states of exhilaration and unimagined episodes of anxiety:

Awful indeed it is to hear it now  
That sudden rustle from the oaks dark bough  
As shrieks the night hawk loud—but hushed and low  
It stills again and midnights musings now  
In their still fears remain

(16-20)

...

Yet soothing now it is in this lone place  
The forming dewdrops melting birth to race  
As sauntering doubtful on in fearful pace  
Its misty moisture chilleth on my face  
A soft refreshing calm

(26-30)

The employment of nocturnal associations, ('Silence' (4), 'Midnight', (6), 'tomb' (10), 'darkness' (11), 'night hawk' (18), 'white owl' (38), 'death' (35), aids the psychological and physical anxiety which the poem self-consciously creates. Constructing its own fears, and inducing its own suspense, Clare's poem is able to summon a terror and tension that have parallels with the terrible beauty Mary Shelley manages to perfect, as she brings to life the fiend who embraces humanness and slowly opens 'the dull yellow eye.'<sup>57</sup> Clare's journey through darkness also unconsciously bears overtones of the Expressionist style of the early

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<sup>57</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or The Modern Prometheus*, ed. M. K. Joseph, World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969) 57.

twentieth-century. The poem's subjective perspective is the channel through which the transmission of personal moods and ideas takes place and become both determinative and efficacious. The Gothic and the Expressionist styles do not overcome one another; they instead offer complementary visions of reality.

The juxtaposition of sound and silence as Clare walks through the woods creates a circumscribed world in which one's imagination may journey endlessly. This is achieved through the poem's representation of time. It confines itself to the present and legitimises the claim of the present to be the measure of all things. The future is cancelled and the past is suspended until we arrive at stanza eleven at which point historicity is allowed to enter and influence the finite abyss of this poetic portrait of the real. The poem's interest in building time is another of 'Verses On Midnight Made During A Journey's' actualisations which is to reflect a sense of 'realness' and to reconstruct the existential disorientation that seizes the individual post-*thrownness*.

Out of the murky ambiguity of the poem, a reference point finally emerges through thematic repetition without the risk of its repetition becoming mere repetition. He can absorb himself in the cares of the day but when Midnight falls, the heart itself falls into metaphor and is still. This calm phase between day and night is the time in which *Daesin* must one again face the questions that face its existence. It is as if the poem is also conscious of Clare's need to return to his existential ontology. Momentarily, the poem enters another scene but true to its own agency, it returns to the existential:

Midnight is deep indeed awfully deep  
 The world so busy once all lost asleep  
 Nor flies a bird nor insect cares to creep  
 Even ones thoughts a sabbath keep  
 And makes the heart their tomb

...

(6-10)

How dismal seems the thought to think that I

In this deep wood and dark black dismal sky  
Of all the world am left with unclosed eye  
Treading the lonely wood to think and sigh  
In startling fears alarm

(21-25)

Clare does not seek a violent distortion of the perspective being presented in order to achieve maximum emotional effect. No hyperbolic contours exist; not through the diction, nor in terms of its literary behaviour. Aesthetic considerations are also subsumed in the poem's articulation of a tense but private existential experience. The portrayal of the way Clare finds himself existing in the world, responsible for creating a path through the 'woods' he hopes will lead him to some insight, overrules any concessions to poeticism. There is an assemblage of standard images that show no interest in being technical or literary, only functional. Phrases such as 'misty moisture' (29), 'deepest night' (46) or 'nights black robe' (54), affirm or excites nothing the imagination is able to esteem. With a seemingly exoskeletal layer, the poem seems wholly self-enclosed in its interest to portray Clare both as a persona and a spectator walking through the panorama of life's disconcerting journey.

Clare is not distracted or indeed paralysed by the potential terror life holds. Nor, is he waiting receptively in the dark for meaningful realisations to pass by, relieving him of the many moments that fill him with trepidation. 'That solemn deadly solemn awful scene / (56) that 'Each dismal corner fills' (45), makes itself known as the fundamental spectacle that needs to be confronted. Stung into existential alertness by the 'the white owl[s] screams' which have upset the calm of *everydayness*, Clare, as the human individual, begins that walk of realisation wherein he must continue to journey unaided in the all-encompassing darkness. His past knowledge with these woods is indicated; 'the old clock in its rifted tower' (48) implies some level of familiarity. But as 'the gloom and shade his fearful eyes behold' (52) certainty gives way to uncertainty and Clare becomes measurably anxious. His anxiety is partially born out of 'fears dread history' (55) whereby past fears interpenetrate the

existential psyche and get in touch with, according to Heidegger, the then when *Dasein* was thrown *into existence*.<sup>58</sup> The circumstances and conditions Clare faces in the ‘now’ lose their relevance and their urgency to the fears experienced in the past. These fears have now been allowed to irrationally dictate to the senses escalating fear.

That Clare’s awareness has been heightened concerning his existential aloneness is not an epiphenomenal moment; this episode translates as an unveiling of the ‘existential spatiality of *Being-in-the-world*.’<sup>59</sup> Where Clare is existentially is the point when *Dasein* is brought before the ‘that-it-is’ of its ‘there.’ ‘Abandoned to [him]self’<sup>60</sup> and thinking through human Being, Clare concludes that ‘Night finds [him] on this lengthening road alone.’<sup>61</sup> Independently, Clare manages to provide an answer to how a poem is able to reflect and express the complexity of life and ‘say’ existence. This for Heidegger, is a necessary part of the nature of a poet whose *Dichtung*<sup>62</sup> brings into *Openness*, the significance of ‘*Dasein* being delivered over to its Being.’<sup>63</sup> Writing ontologically through poetry, Clare’s thinking validates Heidegger’s assertion that ‘the speech of genuine thinking is by nature poetic.’<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 321: 276.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 180:141.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> Clare, ‘Child Harold’, *The Later Poems*, vol.1, 40-88 (49).

<sup>62</sup> The German word for poetry.

<sup>63</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67:42.

<sup>64</sup> Albert Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, x.

## Chapter Six

### **Clare's Existential Displacement: Interpreting Poetry as Space**

After being prompted by nature to contemplate the nature and meaning of human Being, Clare's sense of his own existential ontology is heightened. He links an acutely sensitive attunement to the environment with enquiries into existential meaning by participating in a more expansive notion of Being. The poet's existential experience of *Being-with-others*<sup>1</sup> coupled with an awareness of his *Being-in-the-world* brings to the fore his desire to individuate his Being.

*Being-in*, as Heidegger explains in Division II of *Being and Time*, is 'the ontological Constitution of inhood [Inheit].'<sup>2</sup> '...*Being-in-the-world* is a state of *Dasein* which is a necessary *a priori*,...' <sup>3</sup> However, Heidegger asks within his own inquiry, 'What is meant by *Being-in*?' He answers his own question with an elucidation that explains *Being-in-the-world* as an existiale of *Dasein* understood ontologically and not as an existentielle component of *Dasein*'s ontological structure.'<sup>4</sup> What must be grasped from Heidegger's explanation of *Dasein*'s *thrownness*, is that *Dasein* is thrown 'in' something as part of its 'disclosedness as *Dasein*.'<sup>5</sup> This 'in' refers to the spatiality of the world, and is inextricably linked with the existiale structure of 'being-there.'

Because *Dasein* is *thrown*, it is not possible for Clare to not be 'in' the world. Bewilderment and the confusion of the world's voices are intrinsic to *Being-in*. Therefore, to

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<sup>1</sup> A Heideggerian term which explains *Dasein*'s Being as an ontological existiale state of being-with-others who have the same Being as *Dasein*.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), Trans. of *Sein und Zeit*, 1927, 78:53.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> An existentiell understanding addresses the facts about things in the context of the world, in terms of their existence, and how *Dasein* performs actions in its *everydayness*. An existentielle understanding differs from an ontological understanding of things in the world such as *Dasein*, because an ontological understanding encompasses *Dasein*'s existiale ontological structure towards Being. See *Glossary*.

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 171: 133.



not hear the noise of *everydayness* so keenly, Clare listened to the internal voice which spoke within him about poetry and the poetry of nature.

The chapter's argument focuses on Clare's endeavours of 'non-Being-in.' The chapter discusses how Clare's *Being-in-the-world* is spent in solitude away from 'the Others' and how he re-functionalises his relationship with poetry. Poetry becomes a space for him to be 'in' and Clare dwells in the space of the words across the page; on the page, he is in a place different from his groundless existence. The chapter reveals Clare's desire to locate himself, his identity and his poetic vocation within a different ontology. The chapter traces and documents how poetry was used by Clare to soothe the violence of communal and existential estrangement. This is achieved by addressing Clare's 'out of home-ness' in existential, ontological terms together with the concept of homelessness within a geo-spiritual context and his inability to demarcate any place that could provide a sense of dwelling or a sense of 'at home-ness.' The deeply ingrained feelings of exile acting as the catalyst to lean on the imagination and the poetic when the world has been reduced to fact are the overriding themes.

*Being-in-the-world* and *being-in* his village-world of Helpston brought about a realisation within Clare of there being an issue with the idea of companionship. Clare's experience of alienation and isolation made him turn to solitude for a sense of belonging. If contentment could not be found in the world, Clare would find it in the different space environments of solitude, poetry and the natural world. Clare finds himself in a solitary role rather than one which is communal. The charm solitude affords is a liberating force for the poet to momentarily forget how he was open to be interpreted as a social pariah. An untitled poem that begins with the line, 'There is a charm in solitude that cheers' exposes how Clare is able to leave behind the commotion of isolation and submerge himself in the paradox of seclusion's fulfilling emptiness:

There is a charm in Solitude that cheers  
A feeling that the world knows nothing of  
A green delight the wounded mind endears  
After the hustling world is broken off

(1-4)<sup>6</sup>

The lines have a double focus. While Clare is observing, he is also reflecting and self-reflecting. The joy of solitude that Clare records in this poem is something that ‘The world knows nothing of’ (2). The lines convey how essences are able to flow through words to convey meaning. They appear not to shape what already exists, but to suggest that the world, can be removed from all sensory perception. Clare’s ‘green delight’ (3) is an uninterrupted representation of the heightened moment when ‘the wounded mind endears’ (3) the audible occasion of calming sensory pictures that are able to reach the crowded consciousness. Clare goes beyond the pursuit of enlightenment and moves to a place where ‘the hustling world is broken off’ (4) and the world simply becomes occluded from all cognitive channels.

The world of *there-being*, and other *beings-with*, possesses an onerous nature that does not provide the consolation for, and seclusion from, the discord and stresses that beset Clare. The leisurely time he spends with the gypsies<sup>7</sup> away from his own village allowed him to feel part of humanity again. This was in antithesis to bearing the weight of the identity of the ‘peasant poet’ who was looked upon and interviewed as if he were a human with a completely disparate and alien disposition. Yet, the gypsies with their cultural practices and traditions that Clare admired and enjoyed, provided extended moments that were only temporary. For Clare ‘to be’, and to be in the world but also to appreciate his ability to forget it, he had to turn to the innate spontaneity of nature. Nature extinguished the horrors of post-enclosure and Clare’s uncertain future. It also accommodated those times when Clare’s desire was to spend time in the first person singular. Solitude, for Clare, was not an abstract

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<sup>6</sup> John Clare, *The Later Poems*, 596.

<sup>7</sup> See Claire Lamont, ‘John Clare and the Gypsies,’ *JCSJ* 13 (1994): 3-19.

phenomenon but a geo-spatial location where the world could reveal itself to him, but on his terms.

On four occasions, he affirms solitude as a very positive experience. Clare depicts his sensibility's receptiveness to the non-verbal discourse of the sound of inspiring beauty that is conducted under the influence of the uninterrupted pastoral sublime. The description of his solitude echoes his self-made society. For him, being solitary was being alone and well, aware of the fullness of his own presence rather than of the absence of others and otherness. In the poem 'Love of Solitude' (1846)<sup>8</sup> nature absorbs Clare's fusion of psychological, existential and social complexities into its own soul, convincing and reassuring him at the same time that it is able to alleviate him of his collective anxieties which it disseminates amongst only the 'wood winds to hear' (11). The continual oscillations of the trees represent the quiescent breath of nature. The poet appreciates silent green voices as a balm and the sequestration from worldliness:

I love the rough and smooth of nature's voice  
The quiet, and the rude  
For Nature never had unpleasant voice  
But sweet as Solitude  
I love the tumult in the forest trees  
And wood winds to hear  
In nature's soul of quiet sympathies  
There – there's nought to fear  
Nothing creating pain or harm  
And no noises rude (5-14)

To listen to and hear nature's self-subsistence far removed from the socio-political is the essence of Clare's stated bliss. Clare chronicles the Edenic content of nature in its truth. However, unlike other poems such as the sonnet 'The Village Boy' (1824)<sup>9</sup>, 'With every

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<sup>8</sup> Clare, *The Later Poems*, vol.1, 239-40.

<sup>9</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, 5 vols (vol. 4), eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 148.

smell and sound and sight' he is not 'beguiled' (3). Clare is able to grasp not 'the essential nature of truth but the truth of essential nature.'<sup>10</sup> As a spectator of the vibrancy of this non-human world, the poet is able to evaluate nature's voice. It is described using words that refer to texture and subsequently human characteristics. The sets of antonyms, 'Rough, smooth' (5), 'quiet and rude' (6), refer to nature's voice as it changes both in appearance and tone. When it is as 'sweet as Solitude' (8), the voice of nature enunciates its unbounded freedoms. When it is 'the tumult in the forest trees' (9) in resonant acoustics, the voice names its 'thingly character.'<sup>11</sup> It articulates, expresses and sounds out, but it is never 'unpleasant' (7). Yet, the word 'rude' seems to be at variance with the evocation of the constancy of the voice's pleasantness. Clare is using the word as a homonym. In line 6 it is indicative of nature's voice as movement; whereas in line 14, the word is used in the context of disturbance or interruptions to Clare's appreciation of nature occurring precisely as itself. Although the lines seem to function as the presentation of a differing array of sounds, the words also manage to create more aesthetic value than the diction achieves by virtue of a kinaesthetic texture. The words create the idea that what presents itself as ontic, can be felt by touch. Yet, the objects Clare speaks of belong to the phenomenal world. The 'tumult in the forest trees' (5) and the 'wood winds' (6) seem to be companions but are a part of the essences that belong to nature.

The solitude the diction constructs borders on the mystical or fantastic lands such as the 'Arabia' that Walter de la Mare apprehends or Xanadu in Coleridge's dream vision.<sup>12</sup> There is nothing 'creating pain or harm' (13). What is more, 'nature's soul of quiet [which] sympathises' (11), generates the impression that nature is peaceful because its soul or its nature understands the strife Being creates for the individual and consequently, sympathises

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Origins of the Work of Art', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 15-88 (50). Hereafter, 'OWA.'

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, 'OWA', 32.

<sup>12</sup> Walter De La Mare, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979) 79.

by being a peaceful solace. As Clare, in his every-day living, helped to thresh crops, so too he cultivated solitude. In the longest poem on solitude, some three hundred and twenty-two lines, the state of being alone with oneself has become so ingrained into Clare that solitude becomes an anthropomorphic companion:

Solitude I love thee well  
 Now the evens warning bell  
 Starts me oer the pasture free  
 To converse & talk wi thee  
 Wether side the woods we rove  
 Or sweep neath the willow grove  
 Wether sauntering we proceed  
 Cross the green or down the mead  
 Wether sitting down we look  
 On the bubbles of the brook

(1-10)

This long poem, which is also entitled ‘Solitude’ (1819)<sup>13</sup>, flaunts its ability to relocate its writer’s thoughts from the *everydayness* of existential significance to a ‘supernatural naturalism.’<sup>14</sup> As his eyes roam through the rural scenes, a space is assigned to the reader to participate in what is declaring itself to the poet. The reader is also able to sense the capacity of nature as a living entity to be a purposeful haven for the farmhand increasingly bewildered and isolated by the treatment of himself and his gift of poetry. During 1808-21, the years in which his early poetry was being put into print, Clare distinguishes two communities within Helpston, ‘the conceptual and the natural.’<sup>15</sup> These communities help shape his discourse on his existence which is, primarily, dualistic in nature. ‘Clare’s representations [of his conceptual community] insist on the world’s independence from the poet’s observing

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<sup>13</sup> John Clare, ‘Solitude’, *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, vol.2, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 338-50.

<sup>14</sup> W. J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1980) 65. Hereafter, *The Poetry of Nature*. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Houghton, “The ‘Community’ of John Clare’s Helpston”, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 46.4 (2006): 781-802 (781).

consciousness, even as the poet is contained within the world.’<sup>16</sup> His impassioned writing, unequivocally details nature as a medium of peace:

& the breezes feather feet  
Crimping oer the waters sweet  
Trembling fans the sun tand cheek  
& gives the comfort one woud seek  
Stretching there in soft repose  
Far from peace & freedoms foes  
Spots so still so wild so rude  
Dear to meet thee solitude

(169-76)

The lines connect Clare’s consciousness with the inner layer of nature unfolding solitude through sound. When he writes, ‘[T]he breezes feather feet / Crimping over the waters sweet’ (169-70) it seems as though Being were writing the poem. He is able to put off his ontological mood of *being-towards-the-world* and enjoy ‘The splendour of the simple’<sup>17</sup> using visually descriptive words and reflection.

Clare’s lines are expressive of Heidegger’s poetic ontology. Heidegger ventures that ‘the thinking of Being’<sup>18</sup> should be felt in every word waiting to become a poetic word. Clare’s lines communicate the act of transcendence. In the depths of solitude, a crossover occurs. Clare moves from being confronted with images of existential reality to thinking thoughts alive with sensory perception. The rhythmical construction of the lines opens up a realm of sensation in which Clare can feel his solace more keenly.

But there is another element within Clare’s desire for solitude; a dark disposition that reflects his sense of involuntary frustration and dissatisfaction with the idea of ‘the others’ and the lack of human fraternity. Charged with a more philosophical energy, its essence is

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 781.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, ‘The Thinker as Poet’, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 2-14 (7).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

conveyed by Sartre's axiom that 'Hell is other people' in his play *Huis Clos (No Exit)*.<sup>19</sup> According to Sartrean thought, the individual wants to be autonomous, yet the individual is doomed to need others, whether they want to or not. Alongside this, is also a need for respect and adulation from others. Clare's encapsulation of Sartre's existential observations is to be found in his long, sometimes lamenting description of his hostile environment in his poem *The Village Minstrel* (1819-21). However, 'Love and Solitude'<sup>20</sup> also anticipates Sartre. Beginning with the phrase 'I hate', the poem is a reminder that Clare has displaced his penchant to begin poems with the phrase 'I love' before his asylum years. 'I hate the very noise of troublous man' (1) Clare writes, as he vents his anguish at the probable impossibility of not becoming a *being-with*. The sonnet is a contained invective against the noise of humanity amidst the very helplessness of being human to which Clare must inevitably submit. Given his anger at failing to find a place 'to be' outside the world, Clare can only wish for 'The dearest place that quiet ever made' (8). Although it is steeped in existential reality, the poem's imaginative impulse is driven by the need for Clare's consciousness to be accommodated by stillness and a silence the world is not able and will never be able to give:

Take all the world away & leave me still

(12)

The need to live in a different physical place is inseparable from what Clare is describing. Clare's poem is not a revolt against the state of Being; it simply rages against the impersonal and longs for an inner and outer solitude, using all the aesthetic rhetoric it is able to mobilise:

Free from the world I would a prisoner be  
And my own shadow all my company;  
And lonely see the shooting stars appear,  
Worlds rushing into judgment all the year.

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<sup>19</sup> Jean -Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage International, 1989) 3-46 (45).

<sup>20</sup> John Clare, *Poems of Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.5, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) 248.

Oh, lead me onward to the loneliest shade,  
The dearest place that quiet ever made,  
Where kingcups grow most beauteous to behold  
And shut up green and open into gold.

(3-10)

The imagery of the cornered spirit in 'Love and Solitude' is an evocation of Clare's awareness of place and space. Clare's awareness becomes more insightful, thought-provoking and pathetic as the external dynamics that surrounded his life, instigates a poetic and existential move that furthers his interest in transcendental progression rather than existential continuity.

After *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) the loco-descriptive genre becomes blurred, dislocated and less frequently adopted as the main characteristic of Clare's poetic style. The difference in Clare's poetic approach can be discussed as a vacation of the centre rather than a shift from it. His poetic essence gradually but assuredly morphs. It shifts from being the focal point for concise impressions, to being the mainstay of his perceptive contemplations that flowed from, and addressed, his internal tensions. Using poetry to evoke what Heidegger's refers to as *Denken*,<sup>21</sup> Clare intensified his analysis of what reality presented to him as reality, and the imposition of this reality upon his existential and poetic existence. The difference in centrality can be explained by the energising of Clare's philosophical abstractions that, in a movement toward an elevated consciousness, became linked to 'a matrix of psychological, social and imaginative considerations'<sup>22</sup> which revealed a poet and 'a man searching beyond his own convictions.'<sup>23</sup>

The attempt by Clare to dissipate and transcend the ordinary chaos of his world's constitution left him in a wide inescapable space that he inhabited on his own. His desire for solitude was borne out of the need to indulge his intellectual sensibility and to avoid being

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<sup>21</sup> This term relates to Heidegger's idea of what is most thought provoking to thinking, what thoughts should appear to thinking and, it is for *Dasein* to discover.

<sup>22</sup> John Vaughan Gordon, 'John Clare: The theme of Isolation in his Poetry', MA thesis. U of Durham, 1983, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Pack, *Wallace Stevens: An Approach to his Poetry* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1958) 10.



overcome by the dreary normalness of what Kierkegaard calls 'The Crowd', Nietzsche labels the 'The Herd' and Heidegger refers to as *The They*. Thus, Clare was forced into a state of isolation that progressed into a self-perceived sense of alienation. If he could not achieve *Being-with, Being-in* would also prove elusive. This, in turn, matured into a steady movement towards Heidegger's ontologically inappropriate state of loneliness; inappropriate since when 'there being' is delivered over to [its] Being'<sup>24</sup> its ontological projection is a *being-with-others*.

The reification by Clare of a realm that was situated between utopian solitude and stark loneliness resulted in a poetic language of difference. On account of this difference, Clare develops a language of his own. Without borrowing from Goldsmith, Thomson or Wordsworth, he articulates a new constancy of disconnected self as a way of Being.

Writing poetry was an extremely anomalous practice alongside the rural conventions of Clare's village life. His intellectual sensibility and his belief, according to John Vaughan Gordon, 'that he had been endowed by Providence with a superior sensitivity towards the beauty of nature and the desire to encapsulate this in the form of verse'<sup>25</sup> are the fundamental reasons for his social alienation and his communal isolation. In Clare's first attempt at a long poem, the reader of this ambitious endeavour is treated to a panoramic view of rural life which is infused with a range of themes and subjects that constructs a mosaic of Clare's interests. The style of *The Village Minstrel* is one that relies on the cadences of the Spenserian stanza to observe, consciously and sometimes unconsciously, the dichotomy between rural idealism and the unsentimental portrayal of a self-perceived peasant who is also a poet. *The Village Minstrel* <sup>26</sup> also shows off its oral form in its early sections. It is a precise reflection of its author because it is full of contradictions. Throughout its course, the

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<sup>24</sup> Paraphrased from Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67:42.

<sup>25</sup> Vaughan Gordon, *Theme of Isolation*, 51.

<sup>26</sup> Clare, *The Village Minstrel, The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, vol.2, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 123-79. Hereafter, Clare, *The Village Minstrel*.

poem gives the impression that it proposes to be about Lubin, a young poet with poetic ambitions living a similar alienated existence. Yet, the poem withdraws from Lubin's poetic development, and frees itself from his grasp on many occasions to move into territories such as village festivities, the impact of enclosure and nostalgia for childhood. The reader cannot be convinced that Lubin is not Clare because his poetic voice, his aspirations and his social concerns are too thinly veiled to not be interpreted as the poet himself.

Critical responses to *The Village Minstrel* have often focused upon the issue of identity.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the poem does provide openings for such readings. This chapter adds a new way of reviewing this theme. Clare's reasons for shunning society to adopt solitude as his community are discussed in relation to the Heideggerean idea, which has been explained above, as his ontological *being-with*.

Through the eyes of Lubin, but in the voice of Clare, the origins of the poet's solitude become lucid. Clare in his autobiographical transparency (12-18, 22, 28-30) is making the reader aware that he was born and not made to be a poet.<sup>28</sup> From his childhood, he was called to 'the muses fires' (2) despite interruptions whose sole function is to obstruct the provocative whispers that call the mind to poetry:

Yet oft fair prospects cheerd his parents dreams  
 Who had on Lubin founded many a joy  
 But pinching want soon baffld all their schemes  
 & draggd him from the school a hopless boy  
 To shrink unheeded under hard employ  
 When struggling efforts warmd him up the while  
 To keep the little toil could not destroy  
 & oft wi books spare hours he would beguile  
 & blunderd oft wi joy round crusoos lonely isle

(376-84)<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For an example, please see William D. Brewer, 'Clare's Struggle for Poetic Identity in *The Village Minstrel*', *JCSJ* 13 (1994): 73-80.

<sup>28</sup> Clare is buried in St Botolph's churchyard, Helpston. His gravestone has the inscriptions 'To the Memory of John Clare The Northamptonshire Peasant Poet' and 'A Poet is Born not Made.'

<sup>29</sup> Clare, *The Village Minstrel*, 139.

The poem's decision to empty itself into Lubin is bound up with Clare's confidence that Lubin could 'say' him and could disclose his internal drama. *The Village Minstrel* explores the reasons for Clare's non-inclusion in village life. The poem also illustrates how the word community becomes a trope for isolation and alienation the more Clare made reference to it.<sup>30</sup> His separateness, and subsequent aloneness, sets up the juxtaposition of living in green, but existing in a social wasteland, whose *everydayness* dominated its own landscapes with its defunct possibilities and the impossibility of new revelations.

The enunciation of nature of itself to Clare's senses was the imperative for the poet to dichotomise one world from the other. Clare did not always deplore his paradoxical existence in the world of many voices. There were times when he could expend his energies walking and composing in the other world made up of the single utterance of nature's Being. In the fullness of nature's existence, Clare's genius could be released. He could be a part of nature rather than a social anomaly and submerge himself in the writing of the beauty of nature's art:

Sequesterd nature was his hearts delight  
 Him would she lead thro wood & lonely plain  
 Searching the pooty from the rushey dyke  
 & while the thrush sang her song long silenced strain  
 He thought it sweet & mockt it oer again  
 & while he pluckt the primrose in its pride  
 He ponderd oer its bloom tween joy & pain  
 & a rude sonnet in its praise he tryd  
 Where natures simple way the aid of art supplyd

(155-63)<sup>31</sup>

The beauty of poetic form and the beauty of the natural world coalesce in Clare's variety of rhythms and tone. Lubin wanders where he will, detailing his actions of plucking primroses

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<sup>30</sup>See John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013) for a detailed discussion of Clare's 'Representation of Rural Life' (105-68) and the different meanings of community which shaped Clare's poetry and his solitude. (190-93).

<sup>31</sup> Clare, *The Village Minstrel*, 130.

(160) and searching for pootys (157); and it is these actions that create the fertility of the visual phenomena this pictorial scene achieves. The diction too, helps to communicate the immense sense of freedom Clare feels as he walks ‘thro wood & lonely plain’ (156). The profusion of images contained in Clare’s diction aids the act of depiction rather than representation. This vivid and tactile language extends, and aggrandises, the freedom within this scene and helps keep the reality of the world suspended and at bay. On hearing the singing of the thrush, Clare decides to mock its strains (159). The action of mocking is also to be found in the simultaneous layer of Clare mimicking the sophisticated art of nature’s intricacies using ‘strict rules of verse [which] flow as if they were wholly untied.’<sup>32</sup>

In the haven of nature, Clare is enthralled by the solitude nature provides. He could appreciate the paradox of its complete emptiness. Every outing, whereby Clare enjoys his world within a world, is an occasion of triumph. Nature absorbs Clare’s isolation and he, in turn through his beatifications of nature, could enjoy a sense of home. Nevertheless, the tension between Clare attempting to perform a quasi-existential sequestration between himself and the Others, is always apparent. This idea is depicted in ‘In Hilly Wood’ (1819-20)<sup>33</sup>, a poem that portrays the truth of existence and the state of *being-in*.

The poem confesses that Clare can make no claim to owning nature. It is to be shared with other members of humanity. ‘In Hilly Wood’ the poem’s narrative presents the experience of a subject with its accompanying emotion; the quiet rapture of being alone. Submerged in self-exile, continued wakefulness in the *everydayness* becomes occluded by the bliss of silence. If nature speaks, it does so reticently about its own occurrences.

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<sup>32</sup> William Barnes, ‘The Old Bardic Poetry’, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 1867. Quoted in Geoffrey Grigson, ed. *Selected Poems of William Barnes* (Muses’ Library, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950) 33.

<sup>33</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.2, 62.

Clare is 'nestling deep in boughs' (1) and the distant ploughmen (2) are not able to discern him (4). Protected from view by the thick leafy armies (6), he is safe to delight in the enchantment this mini paradise provides:

The sunbeams scarce molest me with a smile  
So thick the leafy armies gather round  
And where they do, the breeze blows cool the while  
Their leafy shadows dancing on the ground

(5-8)

It is ironic that Clare does not want to be seen, but the flowers are willing to expose their petals, perking up their heads in the hiding grass between (10). It is as if they are acknowledging the hermetic kinship between Clare's presence and their own.

Whilst the poem presents itself as a restorative resource and a refuge from worldhood, it also provides an analogy for further interpretation. 'In Hilly Wood' demonstrates the Romantic understanding of the relatedness and compatibility between nature and the human experience. It is also an incarnation of Heidegger's concepts of Authenticity and Inauthentic Being. The irony of *being-in* but not *being-with* is played out. Beyond feeling and tranquillity, 'In Hilly Wood' depicts the dynamics of detachment at work in the relations between a crowd and the individual. The ploughmen are busy with their ploughs. But they are representatives of what makes Clare an anomaly. Hence, Clare's broken experience of the hilly wood is one which can be read as a constant interruption to Being. His initial experience of internal tranquillity is undermined. *The They* and the world are always only moments away.

Clare's self-imposed isolation is not one that is suggestive of a negative state of loneliness. Time spent in 'mid wood silence' (11) is essential in that it demarcates for him a necessary sense of place. He is always involved in a constructive state of engagement with aloneness. Solitude for Clare is more than 'the undisturbed equanimity and the inhibited ill-

humour of ...everyday concern'<sup>34</sup> Rather, solitude admits awareness that 'Being [has] become manifest as a burden.'<sup>35</sup>

These brief Edenic or truly Romantic moments, construct a time frame that could not be maintained or re-constructed. The noise of the other world called and Clare's isolation in that world again became experientially real. As a result, images begin to surface in *The Village Minstrel* and in later poetic occasions<sup>36</sup> of an individual experiencing the instability of 'out of home-ness' and an inner search to find 'home-ness.' His dedication to artistic endeavours alienated him from 'the rest' and the poet's only option was to move his idea of habitat closer to the words and pleasures of his poetry:

& ruddy milk maids weave their garlands gay  
Upon the green to crown the earliest cow  
When mirth & pleasure wears its joyful brow  
& joins the tumult wi unbounded glee

...  
He lov'd 'old sports' by them reviv'd, to see  
But never card to join in their rude revellry

(184-87, 189-90)<sup>37</sup>

Even though the pleasures of the milkmaids infuse noise and activity into the lines, Clare's sober psychological understanding of his social position frames the lines. The milkmaids enjoy 'the tumult wi unbounded glee' (187) but the stress on the word 'unbounded' also emphasise Clare's feelings of non-inclusion. Lines 180-90 reveal Clare's vicarious enjoyment of 'old sports' but concludes in dispiritedness.

Clare lived within his poetry, but because his life was in his poetry, it was a home that was full of conflict. The question for Clare was, 'Where was life to be lived?' In the idealised

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<sup>34</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 173:135.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> The Northborough Sonnets and the poems that issue from Clare's sense of loss and dislocation after moving to Northborough such as 'The Flitting' (1832) provide exemplification of the point being made.

<sup>37</sup> Clare, *The Village Minstrel*, 131.

sublimity of Helpston? Within ‘the self-sufficing power of solitude?’<sup>38</sup> Or in the realms of the poetic?

In Division I, section V of *Being and Time*, Heidegger discusses the *Falling of Dasein* into *publicness*. During this non-projection of ontological possibilities, *Dasein* or ‘being there’ becomes anxious as opposed to fearful. ‘Being there’ does not have any distinct object for its dread. Rather, it is anxious for itself generally for *being-in-the-world*. It is anxious in the face of its own self and its want for individuation in the midst of *The They*.

Angst is an awakening in *Dasein*’s ontology to its individuation as it brings about the realisation to *Dasein* that it is not at home in the world. It comes face to face with its own ‘uncanny’ state which, in the German, is translated as *Unheimlich* and within a Heideggerian context, means ‘not at home.’ During the process of *Dasein*’s individuation, it becomes open to hearing ‘the call of conscience’, which comes from *Dasein*’s own self when it wants to be its Self. This Self is then open to truth, understood as the unconcealment of the ownmost of its Being.

Heidegger’s ontological interpretation of estrangement is extremely helpful in explaining Clare’s feelings of alienation, isolation, the issue of how he was ‘to be’ and how he was to project himself towards the world. The philosopher’s ontological rationale provides a language to discuss Clare’s existential state of being ‘not at home’ and not being-with. That said, Clare’s *The Village Minstrel* has its own poetic way of articulating Clare’s sequestration, as is evidenced in the following lines:

Lone wanderings led him haply by the stream  
Where unpercied he joyd his hours at will  
Musing the cricket twittering oer its dream  
Or watching oer the brook the moon lights da[n]cing beam  
(232-35)<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Wordsworth, ‘The Prelude’ Book II, *The Major Works*, 392-404 (394).

...

But ah such trifles are of no avail  
Theres few to notice him or hear his simple tale

(243-44)<sup>40</sup>

The affirmation that Clare's aloneness and self-sufficiency received in previous sections of the poem has given way to subtle despondency. He enjoys his 'Lone wanderings' (232) and 'watching oer the brook the moon lights danci[n]g beam' (235), but Clare seems sad that no one recognises his wanderings. Despite Clare going to great lengths to be alone, here, he craves attention albeit, attention from afar. Moreover, he seems to have a longing to share his experiences and talents with his fellow villagers. But he knows 'such trifles are of no avail' (243).

Clare's feelings are made plain in the poem 'Address to an Insignificant Flower Obscurely Blooming in a Lonely Wild.'<sup>41</sup> In this poem, Clare compares himself to a number of lowly flowers and weeds. He is sad that both he and these 'Wild & neglected' (2) blooms go unnoticed by passers-by. He laments that he is not more well-known and more prosperous:

Like unto thee, so mean & low  
Nothing boasting like to thee  
No flattering dresses tempting show  
Can tempt a friend to notice me

(14-16)

Being away from 'the Others' and in solitude, gave way to moments of reflection but also existential introspection. And yet, at a fundamental level, aloneness and 'out of home-ness' do not create a negative situation for Clare. Awakening to his existence, he looked beyond actuality and realised that his existence is poetic. Poetry is not just for literature, 'it speaks of

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<sup>39</sup> Clare, *The Village Minstrel*, 133.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.2, 216-28. Poem dated as 'old.'



man's dwelling.'<sup>42</sup> In an untitled poem beginning 'In lovely blueness' (1805-43) Hölderlin writes: 'poetically man dwells.'<sup>43</sup> In its language which speaks existence, the poetic word makes man measure his existence. Appropriating Hölderlin's poem, Heidegger writes that dwelling in poetry is 'what really lets us dwell'<sup>44</sup> because 'poetic creation, which lets us dwell is a kind of building.'<sup>45</sup> Poetry is Clare's call away from inauthenticity. Away from *The They*, Clare's potential to be himself, or in Heidegger's language, to become an authentic *Dasein*, realising its potential to project its own ontological possibilities, is capable of realisation.

As noted above, when Heidegger discusses the Angst of *Dasein*, he also explains the call of conscience which seems close to the idea of guilt.<sup>46</sup> *There-being* has forgotten the importance of its existence. In an internal process of ontological realisation, *Dasein* silently calls itself back to itself from inauthenticity. The call of conscience that rises in Clare is not measured in pure ontology alone; rather Clare's call that alerts him to his 'out of home-ness' also issues from poetry performing as a conscious calling to the Self, activated by the disorientating and disruptive process of enclosure. Uprootedness intensified Clare's search for a sense of *oikos* (Greek for home), and also cemented his dwelling in the poetic and his *Being-in-poetry*.

Under the rhetoric of progress, the Enclosure Acts (1809) severed and divided the labourers from the fields, walkways and streams that helped to form life as they knew it. These places functioned as the map to the world of Helpstonians and constituted their

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<sup>42</sup> Heidegger, '... Poetically Man Dwells...', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 214.

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, Trans. Michael Hamburger (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 601. Translated from Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart, 1951). First published (London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1966).

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, '...Poetically Man Dwells...', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 215.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> This term is not is used by Heidegger in the traditionally perceived sense of the word. Guilt, for Heidegger in ontological terms, refers to *Dasein*'s thrown projection and the way it always has its being to be. When *Dasein* forgets itself and its Being, it shows up human existence as a lack, a debt that it strives to make up or repay. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 325:280-335:289.

existential cohesion. But in the case of Clare, who was detached from the essence of his Being As 'Inclosure came, and all [Helpston's] glory fell:' (1105), he became uprooted in every sense of the word. The perpetual child, man and poet of nature became estranged to his new environment but often recalling what he has lost. 'Oh, how the thought his native scenes endears!' (1199) as Clare refused to 'reinvent the terms of his existence, making them conform to [the] changed conditions.'<sup>47</sup> Instead, Clare withdrew from the 'melancholy scenes' and 'the cheerless bloom' (1290) in order to reside in an ontology of poetry that could immortalise what could not be lost and where the past could not invade the present because the past constantly occupied it. Writing in elegiac mode to express his loss, Clare deploys language as a palimpsest of 'forever green',<sup>48</sup> a conscious effort to resuscitate and keep alive the way his Being used to 'to be.' Poetry kept alive geo-physical and ontological landmarks in which his Eden could reappear as Clare's diction gave it poetic existence. Enclosure moved Clare away from *The They* and into the sanctuary of poetry. Here, he moved closer to an authentic existence.

Enclosure precipitated the distinctive move from epistemology to ontology in Clare. His native village was now a mosaic of partitions and dissociated images. Seeing his native world-village in this way, Clare became more existentially distant from the other world which he viewed as one more otherness to shut out and exclude. He developed the sense that there are two kinds of truth, poetic and existential. In the poetic world, he could 'be', and meditate on his times spent in an authentic self that existed in an authentic environment. But in the indeterminate, inauthentic and burdensome world of *Dasein-with-Others*, he felt cast into the shadows of unbelonging, away from a sense of home and a space in the world. Helpston now 'so bleak, so strange!' (1228) caused Clare to 'wish he ne'er had known the change (1230);

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<sup>47</sup> Ronald W. Link, *Toward the Abyss: Modern Elements in the Poetry of John Clare*, PhD thesis, U of Miami, 1976, Ann Arbor: UMI, 1976, ATT 302836579, 1-304 (18).

<sup>48</sup> Clare, 'Pastoral Poesy' (dated 1824-32) *Poems of Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.3, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 581-84 (581).

for not only did enclosure change Clare's rambling walks, it also changed the route through which Clare accessed life. Helpston now presented itself as a physical context of naked associations in which his remembering of 'His native scenes[s]! (1183) attempted to fill a vacancy by means of what could seem as an expressively deficient semblance of meaning. Feeling the same existential disorientation Clare could exclaim, like one of T.S. Eliot's lost voices, 'I can connect / Nothing with nothing.'<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the foundation of Clare's loss has its roots in 'the essence of the verb "to inhabit."' <sup>50</sup> His loss encompassed a decimated and altered physical space that before its ruination, accommodated his solitude. The poet openly shares his feelings of displacement. There is a corresponding shift in Clare from a style based fundamentally on informed description to a style preoccupied with Being. As a consequence, his existential consciousness becomes acute as the Schillerian sentimental comes to intrude upon the naive. His revelation in 'Song' from *Child Harold* (1841),<sup>51</sup> a later poem, offers a valuable image of what and where Clare is:

No other home my heart can find  
Life wasting day by day  
(11-12)

In this cold world without a home  
Disconsolate I go  
(1-2)

In conjunction with Clare demonstrating his ecological interests when writing his bird nest poems, it can be argued that these poems are references to the meaning of the word 'dwelling.'

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<sup>49</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'The Fire Sermon', T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) 60-64 (64). Whilst Eliot has been cited as the voice uttering these desperate lines, Eloise Knapp Hay, in *T. S. Eliot's 'Negative Way'* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1982) 90, reminds us that 'To say that Eliot's voice comes to us directly is not, of course, to forget his [Eliot's] assertion in 1919 that the "man who suffers and which creates" are separate, though it calls in doubt that they are "completely separate"....

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000) 155.

<sup>51</sup> Clare, *The Later Poems*, vol.1, 74-75.

Jonathan Bate<sup>52</sup> reads these nest poems as Clare searching for a home in the world. Taking his cue from the French philosopher and historian Gaston Bachelard,<sup>53</sup> Bate maintains that ‘True inhabiting necessitates a willingness to look at and listen to the world.’<sup>54</sup> For Clare to look and listen was to look and see the dread and despair of a meaningless abyss which had replaced the unspoilt expanses of Helpston as home. As pre-enclosure Helpston disappeared, it also took with it his self and sense of belonging. He did not want to ‘listen’ to the world because it made the noise of *The They* and sounded out the internal sighs of his inner reflections which can be read in self-reflective poems such as ‘Nothingness of Life’ (1822).<sup>55</sup> The sonnet sees Clare evaluating life as ‘...the emptiness of lost delight’ (8) and the pointless striving of the individual who ‘pines & sickens over mortal things’ (13).

Additionally, Clare had lost his desire to ‘look’ at the world because it brought into a sharper focus, the despair and disillusionment the impermanence the presence engendered. The destruction of his lingering and cherished childhood and the inconstancy of the metaphysical realm, could not stabilise a space for Clare. For the poet, to be in the world, is not to inhabit it. The village-world he inhabited was only alive in his poetic memory. However, his remembering did not function according to the purposes of recalling, since, he did not carry out the manoeuvre of moving and consigning his memories to the past, but allowed and cleared a space for the past to occupy the present.

Wordsworth’s ideas of home and homeness, dwelling and dwelling spaces, provide a sharper focus for an understanding of Clare’s issues of place and homelessness. Writing on this ‘neglected strand’<sup>56</sup> in Wordsworth, John Kerrigan reveals ‘an inseparable set of poems

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<sup>52</sup> Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 153-75.

<sup>53</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion Press, 1964).

<sup>54</sup> Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 155.

<sup>55</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period*, vol.4, 278.

<sup>56</sup> John Kerrigan, ‘Wordsworth and the Sonnet: Building, Dwelling, Thinking’, *Essays in Criticism*, 35 (1985): 45-75 (45).

on [the theme of] transient and unattainable dwellings.’<sup>57</sup> Wordsworth is not focused on finding a place in order to address his placelessness. He, unlike Clare, is in search of a place or building ‘which through the interchange of habitual recollection and revisiting [that place or building] could be a spot where the mind might dwell.’<sup>58</sup> But during Wordsworth’s travels, ‘he found instead, buildings not to be inhabited – a “Temple and “Minster” made of vapour.’<sup>59</sup> Whilst Clare also laments over lost physical places and his unsituatedness, Wordsworth chronicles his disappointment with the inhabitable ‘buildings made of cloud.’<sup>60</sup>

Wordsworth’s perceptions on habitation and refuge are traced further by Kerrigan through poems such as ‘Written at Evening’ (1788-91) and ‘An Evening Walk’ (1793). The latter is an enlightening exemplification of a search for *oikos* and also manages to clarify the impasse Clare’s homelessness presents. The landscape is accessible and yet the poem makes it clear that no opportunity is provided in which territoriality can be claimed, unless, it is done so by nature or the landscape itself. Using ‘picturesque and locodescriptive norms’<sup>61</sup>, the description of the endless range of ‘Fair scenes’ (13) allows for the temptation to say that on this occasion, and in terms of style, there is a good deal of Clare in Wordsworth. The poem follows the poet’s eye as it wanders from ‘station to ‘station.’ In this poem which can be described as topographical poetry, ‘An Evening Walk’ parallels Clare’s situation in which *Being-in* nature, equates to more than visiting and appreciating a place. Wordsworth is connecting the real nature of the Self with the ‘Harmonious thoughts [of] a soul by truth refined.’<sup>62</sup> ‘An Evening Walk’ is submerged in continuous moments of vision and thus, Wordsworth’s depiction of a want for a home enunciates in Clare, how space refuses to be

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> John Axcelson, “The “Dial’s Moral Round”: Charting Wordsworth’s “Evening Walk”, *ELH* 73.3 (2006): 651-71 (651).

<sup>62</sup> Wordsworth, ‘An Evening Walk’, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 2 vols, (vol.1) ed. William Knight (Edinburgh: William Patterson, 1882-89) 9.

destroyed by time. Each event of Clare visiting his local environs, acts of arrival takes place on two levels at the same time. First, through his sense of belonging with what is familiar to him, Clare arrives home. Secondly, his *Being-in* and *Being-with* is released towards the possibility of arriving at the status of poetic dwelling.

According to Kerrigan, when Wordsworth does achieve a sense of habitation, it is accomplished through a meditation on 'heavenly dwelling[s].' <sup>63</sup> The poem 'Home at Grasmere' <sup>64</sup> from his 'projected *Recluse*' recounts Wordsworth's 'lost faith in 'croft and cottages' <sup>65</sup> on account of them being 'stone built dwellings' <sup>66</sup> and therefore 'distressingly insecure.' <sup>67</sup> His detachment from human homeliness, it could be said, resides in 'an imagination of residence and a residing imagination' <sup>68</sup> whilst Clare's homelessness remains a real geophysical complexity.

The emblem of dwelling that birds' nests are able to symbolise proves to be a point of convergence for both Clare and Wordsworth. Observing birds in their habitats serves to emphasise the poets' search for ontological and physical at-homeness and spiritual homeness respectively.

Clare's writing about his discoveries of bird nests also presents a level of at-homeness that is impermanent and realises two actualities. First, Clare is not consciously using the peculiar beauty of the birds' nests to convey his own issues of *oikos* and homelessness. What can be understood from the beauty and security of the nests are the ideas of place and space. A symbol of aliveness and dwelling, the birds' nests are embodiments of an environment

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<sup>63</sup> Kerrigan, 'Wordsworth and the Sonnet: Building, Dwelling, Thinking', 51.

<sup>64</sup> William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill, The Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984) 174-99.

<sup>65</sup> Kerrigan, 'Wordsworth and the Sonnet: Building, Dwelling, Thinking', 50.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Peter Larkin, 'The Secondary Wordsworth's First of Homes: Home at Grasmere', *Wordsworth Circle* 16.2 (1985): 106-13 (106).

capable of providing habitation and home-ness. Poems such as ‘Hedge Sparrow’<sup>69</sup> (1819-32) and ‘The Yellow Hammer’s Nest’<sup>70</sup> (1825-26) convey the desirability of home but they also outline the constant dangers that plague all habitats. For the Hedge Sparrow it is the ‘skulking cat’ (13). For the Yellow Hammer the ‘snakes with chill and deadly coil’ are responsible for ‘Leaving a houseless home, a ruined nest’ (28). However, amidst the dangers, is the idea of dwelling in a home which is an expression of the idea of settlement.

In another of Clare’s bird-nest poems, ‘The Yellow Wagtail’s Nest’ (1825-26)<sup>71</sup>, the poet’s attention is brought to bear intermittently on the bird, but his focus for the most part, comes to rest on the nest and how it provides shelter. The nest, he writes, ‘lay snug as comfort’s wishes ever lay / Sheltered from rainfalls by the shelving share’ (20, 22). The word ‘sheltered’ (22) is crucial, and mobilises a conversation of situatedness reinforced by the subsequent ‘sheltering roof’ (23). The part of the plough that is broken aggrandises the strategic idea and image of ‘home-ness.’ It is here that the yellow wagtail’s nest can be found supplying respite ‘From rain and wind and tempest....’ (24) as it proves itself to be ‘comfort-proof’ (24). The yellow wagtail’s nest is representative of all that Clare is unable to access. The bird’s nest provides the solitariness of a safe haven, whereas Clare, has no place that will accommodate his Being; he only has a poetic shelter. The yellow wagtail has also chosen to locate its home in the snug of the broken plough’s shelving share and has ‘fixed its dwelling there’ (21). Clare is fixed in his unsituatedness. After enclosure, he epitomised the flux of what it is to be ontologically displaced. His choice of dwelling was removed from him, banished eternally to those moments of reinvention, when he ‘Felt life [was] still Eden [away] from the haunts of men’ (32). His ‘safety-places’ (25) had also been lost whilst the yellow wagtail still has the protection of nature (27).

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<sup>69</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period*, vol.4, 237.

<sup>70</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period*, vol.3, 515-17.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 474-75.

In 'The Moorehen's Nest' (1825-26)<sup>72</sup> there is the idea of an abode that can be returned to because it has been allocated as 'home' and is, therefore, physically and psychologically fixed. 'A flood-washed bank support[s] an aged tree' (2) whose roots are bare and appear to be unstable. Yet 'every summer finds it green and gay' (7) and capable of housing the concept of *Being-in*. The instability of its roots is not a feature in the conception that frames the meaning of habitual for the bird. When 'they themselves to other scenes.... fly' (22), the nests fulfil their roles as homes and memorials of home. Hence, the tree with its exposed roots, annually maintains its function and symbol of having 'home-ness':

For on its roots their last year's homes remain;  
And once again a couple from the brood  
Seek their old birthplace, and in safety's mood  
Build up their flags and lay;....

(10-13)

Heidegger's thoughts on building and dwelling include the reassurance that 'We do not merely dwell' but 'inhabit the habitual.'<sup>73</sup> The moor-hens, from their home-nests, are able to practise and experience the existentiality of *everydayness*. Diving and gambolling (21), they demonstrate their perceived security of being in a home in the world:

And still they hatch their eggs and sweetly dream  
On their shelled nest hung just to touch the stream:

(15-16)

If the Helpston that Clare knew had changed beyond recognition, then he could not name that place and 'To name a place is to allow that place its being'<sup>74</sup> since we enter into our being only when we have 'entered on the place of our being.'<sup>75</sup> The location of Clare's Being had become indefinite, submerged in a place that no longer existed. Wanting his Being to be situated firmly in his pre-lapsarian world, Clare longed to transcend the post-lapsarian

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 468-71.

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 143-62 (147).

<sup>74</sup> Bate, *Song of the Earth*, 167.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*.



landscape that looked back at him when he tried to see the place of his 'home-ness.' 'O could I be as I have been' (1842-64) is his expression of this desire.

This untitled poem that begins with the same sentiment, 'O could I be as I have been'<sup>76</sup>, voices its ache for something different and something better by the use of the past participle and the conditional. 'O could I be as I have been' (1) and 'O could I be what I once was' (5) crowds out all other narratives the poem may wish to express. The quatrains, which roll one idea effortlessly into the other, document Clare's desire for time to have stood still before the ravages of enclosure could take place. The poem is a brave admission of the refusal on Clare's part to accept the limitless possibility the world is ever producing. Clare's desire is for his personal reality to become static and detached from natural, cultural, social and political change. The quatrains move from lamenting what the present is, to an articulation of what Clare has designated as an unimagined reality whereby he could extend that time when he was as he should have been. He is under no illusion that he is homeless since his sense of belonging has diminished: 'And ne'er can be no more' (2). In the same way that Eliot's Prufrock is in a non-referential place where he 'can hear the mermaids singing each to each',<sup>77</sup> Clare transports himself out of all time dimensions to wish that he were 'A harmless thing in meadows green / Or on the wild sea shore' (3-4).

The conditional tense helps Clare to plead to an unknown ear to provide him with alternative living space. His suggested places 'to be' are abstract in nature but possess a link to the world: a world that Clare knew, was acquainted with and could be stabilised by poetry:

O could I be what once I was  
In heaths and valleys green  
A dweller in the summer grass  
Green fields and places green

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<sup>76</sup> Clare, *The Later Poems*, vol.1, 653-54.

<sup>77</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *Collected Poems*, 3-7 (7).

A tennant of the happy fields  
By grounds of wheat and beans  
By gipsey's camps and milking bield  
Where lussious woodbine leans

To sit on the deserted plough  
Left when the corn was sown  
In corn and wild weeds buried now  
In quiet peace unknown

(5-16)

The lines within this poem could be interpreted as a continuation of previous poems in which attempts to transcend the world's reality were the focus. The above poem beginning 'O could I be what I once was' is further on than its theme of the totality of sense experiences suggests. Clare's want to be 're-homed' in the places he mentions, is an existential desire to transcend this reality in order to occupy a sublimely impersonal realm. The poem is all too aware of his wanting to become reattached to those lost scenes, together with his continual searching for a sense of belonging in, and to, somewhere. The sentence 'In quiet peace unknown' is working to reiterate the need for Clare to distance himself from the noisy world and the idle chatter of *The They*. But it is also attempting to translate Clare's need for the unimpeded space that unknown peace is able to provide. It is in this space that Clare longs to fully enter into Being and place his Being. The poet longs to live in, and dwell in the unknowable lithe sphere of the unoccupied which has not been drawn or painted with the colour of poetry but is externally real. However, his being human is conditional. He will be willing to enter all that humanity entails, but his ontological *thrownness* is towards solitude and not being-with. The words 'tennant' (9), 'deserted' (13) and the line 'A dweller in the summer grass (7), illustrate Clare's attitude towards being existentially unsituated. In his desire to exist and dwell in the 'home-ness' that is in the past, Clare leans upon the transitory, the ethereal and the unfixed, thereby extending the phrase 'a free spirit' to full stretch and to its fullest meaning.

In the realisation that his desire for space is in the realm of the poetic, Clare's language changes from one that pleads, to a language that can only wish:

I wish I was what I have been  
And what I was could be  
As when I roved in shadows green  
And loved my willow tree

(24-27)

The infinitive 'to gaze' that begins the last stanza is only an extension of Clare's hoping, wanting and wishing. The qualification of poetry's powerful efficacy to reconfigure what was available 'in solitary joy' (31) 'And higher fancies build' (30), makes it possible for these moments to re-enter the vitality of what is live. 'O could I be as I have been' is a poem that sounds out the tension of spatiality in Clare as he sought to find a place in which to provide shelter for himself and his poetic existence.

The ontology of the poetic becomes more significant for Clare after enclosure since it is within the living consciousness of the words that Clare comes 'to be'; residing as a citizen within the momentum of the text and the fluency of the parataxis that Clare's syntax affords. His habitation within the flourish of what his poetic diction could resurrect poetically builds Clare a sense of home. His search for the *oikos* could always be found amongst the power of poetry to create and 'cause dwelling to be dwelling.'<sup>78</sup> In the case of Hölderlin, as it was for Clare, there are two realities; the possible and the prevailing of the immortalised dwelling places of the past. The coming together of these two realities marks within the fibre of Clare's poetry of loss a new ontology of poetic statements and the pure something of *is*. This makes a case for Clare as a poet who deals with *Being-in* and *Being-with*, and who brings to language at the poetic level Being *qua* Being.

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<sup>78</sup> Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling Thinking', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 215.

Nature and poetry would always provide Clare a habitation and help him in his desire of wanting the world and its pressures to also relocate. In his poem 'I'll dream about the Days to Come' (1837-64)<sup>79</sup> Clare epitomises what he could only relish thinking about when lost in moments of his earthly paradise:

I'll lay me down on the green sward,  
Mid yellow cups, and speed well blue,  
And pay the world no real regard,  
But be to nature, leal, and true,

(1-4)

Renouncing the turning wheels of the world, and his dependency upon it, Clare looks to nature to be his existential guide. How he lives in the poetic space of poetry is to allow himself to be overcome by awe of the phenomenal. On these occasions, it is as if Clare aspires to the Husserlian state of achieving the emptiness of the transcendental ego. He can only see and re-envision what his nature makes manifest and not how the world appropriates, taints and then presents.

The summer's day in stanza four, depicts the soft bleating of the roving sheep (5) and brings 'The happiest things in the green land' (3); an idea far removed from an awareness of 'They who truth, and nature wrong?' (6). *The They* (6), whom Clare speaks of, are commensurate with Heidegger's definition of people who steer *there-being* in a different direction from its own ontological projection. But in Clare's explanation, *The They* breaks 'the peace o' hapless man', (5) and wrong truth and nature (1:6). Within the ontology of the poetic space where Clare resides, the internal dynamics of the world cannot impair the force of inner experience. The world is not an occupant of Clare's sense of home: hence it cannot build or construct a location for Clare. Thus, he will not live in it or with it but 'wi nature, and her song' (8).

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<sup>79</sup> Clare, *The Later Poems*, vol.2, 917-18.

The colours mentioned alongside Clare as he makes his existential decision have a feel of deliberateness about them since they seem to accentuate colours that have an upbeat agency of releasement and freedom. ‘The green sward’ (1), ‘Mid yellow cups and speed well blue’ (2), mask the surrounding drab reality. They encourage the imaginative event of dream[ing] about the days to come’ (16), days when his Eden re-emerges and he is settled. To be true and leal (loyal) to nature is to .... ‘pay the world no real regard’ (3), and create a poetic living space for this poet of self-diffusion.

The heaviness of his existential alienation which parallels his feelings of isolation between the years 1822-27 seems later to have disappeared, or at least, been relegated or removed. Clare realised that to experience the idea of community was to withdraw from the identities which made themselves available to him and be a *being-in-the-poetry-of-nature* rather than a *being-in-the-world*. Poems such as ‘Sonnet on the River Gwash’ (1818-19)<sup>80</sup> and ‘To My Oaten Reed’ (1818-19)<sup>81</sup> exemplify how Clare interprets his rapport with nature as togetherness. Sitting on the River Gwash, Clare is in the company of nature ‘As glides the shaded clouds along the sky’ (7). ‘With tree & bush repleat a wildered scene’ (11), Clare is in communication with nature, feeling it and listening to it until his ‘his heart is at rest’ (14). The wild warble of nature’s rough rude melody (1) in ‘To My Oaten Reed’, is a testament to Clare listening to and hearing nature. When he feels burdened by the dictates of the world (5), nature’s ‘rural notes’ (4) sound out its green ‘rude melody’ (1) reminding him of its ability to be a place, space and comforting companion:

But O thou sweet wild winding Rapsody  
 Thou gurgling charm that sooths my hearts controul  
 I take thee up—to smoothen many a sigh  
 & lull the throbbings of a woe worn soul

(11-14)

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<sup>80</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1, 476-77.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 477-78.

Clare delights in the merging of solitude with the gloriousness of his existential disappearance into an abstract living space. Perhaps taking inspiration from the surrounding colours creating a sense of freedom and positivity, his desire for satisfaction in life has become less of an insurmountable task and much more of a pleasant resignation:

I'll lay me by the forest green,  
I'll lay me on the pleasant grass,  
My life shall pass away unseen,  
I'll be no more the man I was,  
The tawny bee upon the flower,  
The butterfly upon the leaf,  
Like them I'll live my happy hour,  
A life of sunshine, bright, and brief.

(17-24)

However, there is in Clare, something insidious about this acceptance simply to live under the dictates of life. As a poet of Being, Clare illustrates how when all the images of the world are stripped away, with the coldest of resolutions, the individual must decide to live in the world, live alongside it, to be apart from it, or in true Romantic fashion, transcend it through the creative exigencies of the poetic. The world, however, would not go away which meant that it had to become an invisible element in Clare's space. Nevertheless, it crept in more persistently because the metrical rhythms within Clare's poetic space were only a measurable distance away from the rhythmical flow of the world. Moreover, Clare's home was only a home that could provide intermittent shelter in the interim. The happy time he spends here is measured in hours, (12, and 23) and the time he has to 'think' (31) about a different type of existence, must be accomplished within 'A summer's day' (31). However, the world will not allow Clare to 'pass away unseen' (19). The intelligible world still insists on expressing itself in the world of individuals and in their minds. This determines that Clare will be re-allocated to the home that renders him out of home, lost and placeless, listening to the strife and noise

of worldliness (11). On returning to this home where ‘natures lights and shades [of] green’ (9) must be left in another existential dimension, Clare could manage life by having a firm grasp on the memorials the poetic space differentiated and personalised.

grasp on the memorials the poetic space differentiated and personalised.

Dwelling in the ontology of the poetic, afforded Clare the opportunity to affirm his poetic existence. This made viable poetry as home, place and not simply space. Thus, if ‘Language is the house of Being’<sup>82</sup> for Heidegger, for Clare, the word poetry is able to be substituted for the word language. To be, and to be *in-habitance*, determines that the placeless poet occupy the ontological mood of non-Being.

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<sup>82</sup> Heidegger, ‘What Are Poets For?’, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 91-142 (132).

**‘The Present Mixed with Reasons Gone’<sup>1</sup>: Clare and the Subversion of Time**

The genesis of a philosophically poetic relationship between Clare’s ontological poetry and Heidegger’s existential ontology, has presented a discernible and distinct homogeneity in their thinking. Both writers are united in their preoccupation with questions regarding existence. Even in their later work, a philosophical alignment remains perceptible. Heidegger inquired further into language and poetry, and Clare continued to explore questions regarding meaninglessness and his own *thrownness*. The exposition of this correlative affinity has, up to now, shown how Heidegger illuminates Clare’s poetic discourse in regards to his *Being-in-the-world*. It is the contention of this thesis that reading Clare through Heidegger’s pure ontology is a productive endeavour since it allows Clare to become visible as a poet of Being. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two thinkers, whereby Heidegger has acted as the sole intellectual enlightener, now becomes subject to a counterbalance.

Clare’s state of ‘death-but-life-continuity’<sup>2</sup> constitutes the main thrust of the chapter. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates in Clare, the presence of an existential absentness. In essence, Clare, suspends his Being or in Heideggerian terms, embraces the ontological mood of non-Being.

From 1832 and onwards, Clare’s poetic existence evolved smoothly and pathetically into an existential mode when sorrow seemed to be the only portion. His life was challenged by what Jonathan Bate refers to as ‘the storm’<sup>3</sup> and those later years beyond 1841 when he

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<sup>1</sup> John Clare, ‘An Invite to Eternity’, *The Later Poems of John Clare*, 2 vols (vol.1), eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 348-49. Hereafter, Clare, *The Later Poems*.

<sup>2</sup> Paraphrased from Robert Jay Linton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Press Inc, 1996) 4.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador-Pan Macmillan, 2004) 434.



moved further into literary oblivion and an existential abyss. On account of the latter, the poetry that emanated from Clare amounts to a *there being* ‘that... is.... and has to be;’<sup>4</sup> it accommodates an ontology which Heidegger does not develop in *Being and Time* (1927) but which, for Clare, is a projected possibility and a projected actuality.

In ‘*The Theme of the Analytic of Dasein*’ Part One, chapter nine, Heidegger explains how *Dasein* ‘comports<sup>5</sup> itself to its Being,’<sup>6</sup> *Dasein* ‘has always made some sort of decision as to the way in which it is’<sup>7</sup> since ‘*Dasein*, in each case [has] mine[ness] to be one way or another.’<sup>8</sup> *There being* can fall into *The They* or, it can turn away towards its own Being. This is a part of its facticity, its taking up existence and its *being-in-the-world*. However, there seems to be little discussion from Heidegger about what happens when *Dasein* no longer comports itself onto its Being and is inert in projecting its ontological possibilities. This cannot be interpreted as *Dasein* facing its resolution to face death because within Heidegger’s ontological structure, death is not the end, but another way to project Being; albeit the Being of Non-Being.

This issue does not receive some measure of clarification if Heidegger’s concepts of *Care*, Inauthenticity or Authenticity are used as a way of explanation. Care can be described as a multiplicity of ‘ways-to-be’ in relation to *Dasein’s being-in-the-world*. *Dasein* in its *everydayness* projects to do something, produces something, makes use of something or gives something up and lets it go. Should *Dasein* give up and let go of its *thrown* facticity, it does not become inauthentic because it has not fallen and has not ‘flown’ since nothing has made it anxious. Nor does it become authentically itself, in light of it having not comported to being resolute in the face of death. According to Heidegger, however, *Dasein* does not stop

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), Trans. of *Sein und Zeit*, (1927) 173:135.

<sup>5</sup> The verb ‘to Comport’ is used by Heidegger to mean ‘to take oneself towards conscious or unconscious behaviour, or moving oneself to an attitude.

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67:42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 68:42.

projecting and is never free of possibilities. He writes, ‘Hopelessness, for instance, does not tear *Dasein* away from its possibilities, but is only one of its own modes of *Being towards* these possibilities.’<sup>9</sup>

*Dasein* will always comport, but when its ontological mood cannot be discussed in terms of the *everydayness* which ‘is precisely that Being which is “between” birth and death’<sup>10</sup> or the wholeness *Dasein* reaches in death, how is this ontological mood of not comporting to Being able to be explained by Heidegger as another ontological mode? Heidegger explains this apparent aporia with the idea that until *Dasein* “exists” in such a way that until absolutely nothing more is still outstanding in it,...’<sup>11</sup> ‘Such a lack of totality signifies that there is something still outstanding in one’s potentiality for Being.’<sup>12</sup> Although this is and always has been one of *Dasein*’s ontological possibilities<sup>13</sup> and fundamentally, a part of *Dasein*’s facticity, Heidegger does not develop a full discourse on when *Dasein* continually hovers over the terms of its *thrownness* and moves away from being an existential something.

From the time of his middle period (1822-37) to the currency of his asylum years (1841-64), Clare poetically documents how he had left his existence unattended. It is as though he turned away from it in what Heidegger briefly mentions as ‘ownmost inertia’;<sup>14</sup> through his poetic way of perceiving, he acknowledges his own agency of ontological disenfranchisement.

Consequently, the ever-recurring imagery of the beautiful shifts further into a more decisive and discomfoting imagery. This conscious evolution effects a withdrawal from the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 279:236.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 276:233.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 280:236.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 279:236.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 68:43.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 229:184.

sensuous experiences so enchantingly laid out in poetry such as ‘The Breath of Morning’<sup>15</sup> (1832) to the horror of being consciously aware of reality in a poem such as ‘Decay’ (1835). The sonnet, ‘The Breath of Morning’ presents the natural beauty of the awakening village in phrases such as ‘How beautiful and fresh the pastoral smell / Of tedded hay breaths in this early morn’ (1-2). Its precision in detailing the natural is heightened by its devotion to what dominates the contextual scene. The scene of the bawling boy climbing for woodbines ‘Half drowned by dropples patterning pattering on his head / From leaves bemoistened by nights secret showers’ (13-14) illustrates the vividness of the poetry’s privileged moments of encounter with natural scenes. Nevertheless, the poet’s traditional descriptive stream is interrupted by a conscious interpretation of a different organicity. This different organicity brings together as one, double aspects of external and internal reality, and involves the displacement of referential observation by rhetorical meditation. The poem ‘Decay’<sup>16</sup> is sharply aware of human disquiet in the face of existential weariness. Such disquiet begins as a refusal to co-exist with the presence of the symphonies of sound that emanate from natural objects ‘thinging’ their essences. Clare’s vision portrays an individualised psychology that is intimately aware of a necessary change; no longer can life be lived in existential sameness and meaninglessness. The juxtaposition of a beautiful illusion with the sombreness of truth determines the poem’s narrative trajectory. What was pleasant and passive in thought, is now unpleasant and active:

Amidst the happiest joy a shade of grief  
Will come —to mark in summers prime a leaf  
Tinged with the autumns visible decay

(1-3)

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<sup>15</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, 5 vols (vol. 4), eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 250-51.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, 251-52.

Clare produces a version of decay that always approaches from the past and runs to and through the present. 'The happiest joy' (1) in 'summers prime' (2) is downplayed as difference overcasts the scene with its depressive mood. The individual embedded in its existence is always 'tinged' with a 'visible decay' (3). However, Clare is not commenting on how the individual declines through the medium of chronological years; rather, he is documenting the many moments when 'blank forgetfulness' (5) provides the only channel for a refusal to be reminded of life's renunciation of existential truth. The poem's fuller discovery that 'Earth's most divinest is a mortal thing (9) / that fades and fades till wonder knows it not' (11), works in the context of the Christian Creation narrative. Man was created higher than the animals but a little lower than the angels<sup>17</sup> and the tragic irony Clare wants his reader to grasp, is that this divinest thing (9), experiences autumnal degeneration even in times of its 'spring' (10). The complexity of this sentence justifies resentment of life. Life creeps in, unsought like autumn, with its sickness which mars the spring with the *everydayness* of existence. The corollary is that decay increases and the individual decreases and then fades. The intermingling of the infinite and the finite produces nothing that is able to reflect the glorious connection between God and humanity. The initial wonderment of this intercourse diminishes, until there appears to be only enduring silence where there was once, according to Hölderlin, an intimate dialectic.

Feeling uneasy at the starkness of *being-in-the-world*, the individual realises that he or she must face existential instability and lift what P B Shelley calls 'the painted veil.' The narrative direction of Shelley's Sonnet 'Lift not the Painted Veil' (1824)<sup>18</sup>, presents the idea that life is something to be used to consider the possibilities of other worlds. Life is

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<sup>17</sup> *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*, King James Version with Apocrypha, ed. David Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) Psalms 8 v 5, (681).

<sup>18</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works including Poetry, Prose and Drama*, eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) 210-11.

synonymous with existence; it holds nothing, offers nothing and merely fools the individual into believing that its modality is its true essence:

Lift not the painted veil which those who live  
Call Life; though unreal shapes be pictured there,  
And it but mimic all we would believe  
With colours idly spread, —behind, lurk Fear  
And Hope, twin Destinies, who ever weave  
Their shadows o'er the chasm, sightless and drear.

For Shelley, in the initial sestet, for this is a reversed sonnet, life or the painted veil 'mimic[s] all we would believe' (3). The conditional tense helps Shelley in his quest to replace the actual with the possible with an enunciation of the deferral or non-deliverance of truth by life. The individual 'would believe' (3) 'the unreal shapes ....pictured there' (2) because they are believable semblances of what life mimics to be life as it continues to hold back or occludes its real 'substance' (6). 'Lift not the Painted Veil' seems to be a poetic elucidation of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Just as the shadows on the wall do not make up reality at all, Shelley's 'colours idly spread' (4), 'weave' (5) / '...shadows, behind which lurk Fear / And Hope' (4-5). Life is impotent at delivering truth. Shelley knows, because he 'knew one who lifted it' [the veil] (7) and not only did he not find truth (14), but nothing to love and satisfy the tenderness of his heart (2).

Shelley's character found nothing in the world or under the veil that could redeem the world from its image of a place where one can only find 'gloomy scenes' (13). *Being-in-the-world* is a bright blot (12) in a dark and foreboding place where truth hides from even the Preacher (14). Hence, the pointlessness of being an outstanding spirit (13) 'Upon this gloomy scene' (13), defeats the object of having lifted the painted veil. Lifting it puts into motion, not a migration towards ontological destitution, but a state of existential resignation which leaves the individual to observe the shadows that weave (5-6) and choose one of the 'two destinies

of Fear / And Hope' (4-5). Having moved from a created being, to a lost or abandoned character, the individual must forge a trans-world identity or look to a different possible world where it must re-enter Being with not a new ontology as such, but one that is unfamiliar with the 'Worldhood of the world.'<sup>19</sup>

Clare's 'Decay' and Shelley's 'Lift Not the Painted Veil' are written in the context of a negative vision. Paradoxically, the creative power of the imagery that erupts through the diction conveys this vision. It reveals how the concealment of truth and admiration's fall from grace in regards to the 'most divinest' (9)<sup>20</sup> are immersed in enigma, unheeded and made unremarkable. The poets demonstrate varying degrees of reflective perception, yet in their belief that life, its trueness and its truth, uncovers only greater darkness and existential pictures that are prone to fading, they expose life's unworthiness. From their existential core, their poems move towards the attainment of a different ontological mood.

After the spectacle that life has shown itself to be, Clare becomes reconciled with the menace of estrangement. As the poem 'Decay' continues to show, the individual is estranged from its divine status on earth (9) and from praise: '& admiration hath all praise forgot' (12). 'To fade & fall & die like common things at last' (14) is what distinguishes the mortal from the divine as the mortal is shown to be in perpetual threat from mutability.

The need for hope that consumes Clare's early life and poetry<sup>21</sup> dissipates into his diminishing ability to frustrate life's immutable nature. In his serial becomings, the poet, 'Coldly forsaking an unheeding past' (13), projects his 'ownmost possibilities' into an ontological state that Heidegger's ideas do not fully accommodate. Facing the void of an epistemological vacuum and internal death, Ronald Link imaginatively surmises that 'Clare reacted as he had done at the edge of Emmonsales Heath. He instinctively turned towards

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<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 91:63.

<sup>20</sup> Clare, 'Decay', *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, 2 vols, (vol.1), eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 251-52.

<sup>21</sup> See the poem 'Effusion', *Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822* vol.1, 34-36.

home.’<sup>22</sup> ‘At-homeness’ for Clare will be established as that place where there is no darkness, no need for conquest of metaphysical becomings or ontological pressure. Clare leaves the present to its flux and does not hold in any esteem the concern ‘to be.’

With the transitory and the illusory losing its appeal, the poet ‘chooses himself’ away from *The They*. He loses his ontological nature, yet he remains in existence. The successive and inevitable event of this suspension in projection is a caesura, a deadness without death. From this increased state of lifeless aliveness, Clare relinquishes the conception of ‘this reality’ and does not wait for the future to arrive, but brings futurity into the present. He had seen the Eternal<sup>23</sup> and did not require the means of a hermeneutic procedure or an imaginative consciousness in order to access it and ‘Mate for eternity in joys sublime’ (8).

With a sense of elegy, Clare depicts his ontological disengagement and acknowledges the fact that his existential journey has finally become one that can be defined as follows, in a wry version of Hamlet’s famous words: ‘To be—& to have been—& then be not’ (6). This provocative line first affirms Clare’s Being; it then reverses his ontological affirmation with the same misery that similarly overwhelms the ‘summers leaf / Ting[ing] it with....decay’ (2-3). The poetry within this line, lies in the midst of inward resignation; the line reveals the possibility of potentiality as being tantamount to hope; obscure and altogether pointless. The last clause sounds out the past tense and the disappearing of Clare’s presence from within the space of this tripartite verb. ‘To be’ has passed, ‘To have been’ is the exuberance of a ‘nature of pure conscience’<sup>24</sup> that is no longer concerned with meaning. ‘& to have been’ addresses Clare’s current ontological mood, living in the space of a dead world waiting to be reacquainted with a different dead world that cannot die. ‘& then be not’ is to let fall away

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<sup>22</sup> Ronald W. Link, *Toward the Abyss: Modern Elements in the Poetry of John Clare*, PhD thesis, U of Miami, 1976. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1976, ATT 302836579, 1-304 (190).

<sup>23</sup> Clare, ‘Sun-Rising in September’ (1808-19), *Early Poems*, vol.1, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Emmanuel Mounier, *Existentialist Philosophies: An Introduction*, Trans. Eric Blow (London: Rockcliff, 1948) 96.

this life. Thus, Clare can be discussed as a being with a potentiality for Being, comporting in his mode of being a being of in-betweeness, but signalling to nothing.

It was stated in chapter five that Clare's thinking as a poet of Being, and the resultant philosophically poetic discourse, showed him to have a philosophical discourse of his own. Clare's poetic philosophy, specifically during the beginning but also generically scattered throughout his poetic corpus, can be read initially as a poetics of 'being here.' However, during the later years his philosophy deals with a detached *there being*. A passive non-physical death occurs as *there being* becomes what Heidegger terms as 'a suspended transiency, suspended in the void of a durationless now.'<sup>25</sup> Resultantly, he could move his existence as an *ereignis* into *the Open*. There, he could await the arrival of disparate ontological moods and all possibilities. Therefore, it becomes possible to describe Clare at the end of his middle poetry (1832-37), and at the beginning of his later poetry (1837-64), as a poet with a philosophy without method. This philosophy is bound up with addressing the paradox of a non-projecting 'there-being' within existence.

Clare's imagination lost its effectiveness to stop ugliness from creeping up upon the beautiful. And with a quiet resignation, the poet moves, as opposed to being *thrown*, into a different mode of Being. The evolutionary trace that can be observed in Clare does not show a 'march towards nothingness.'<sup>26</sup> Clare's own Being ceases to haunt him as he finally becomes a viable 'is' and develops into an absent 'there in being.' Imposing a self-sequestration from any ontological reference points, Clare simply becomes an 'I am.' He expresses the release of the individual by means of embracing a distinct form of epistemological nihilism. Hence, Clare's paused ontology expresses a different kind of 'is', and identifies a possible underdeveloped component of *Dasein's* structure in its state as a paused ontology.

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'What are Poets For?', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 91-142 (142).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 15.



In his sonnet 'I am' (1848)<sup>27</sup>, the first line 'I feel I am, I only know I am' speaks of an existence that has been disrupted by ontological debilitation and decay. Uttered from the most symbolic of moments in existential inanition, the poet, steeped in the impossible circumstances of the human condition, forgoes his place in the intrinsic striving of Being. Clare's reader is able to witness his ontological immobility. Initially, there is some speculation because he only 'feels' that he is and is not sure that he 'is.' However, this arbitrariness soon receives some ontological legitimacy as he establishes his 'I am-ness.' The poet does not say 'I am this' or 'I am nothing'; he simply asserts, 'I am.' This engenders the most basic of relationships between cognition and recognition but makes no move to bring about a correlation between subject and context. The sonnet 'I am' shows an extraordinary passiveness in sounding out why life can no longer be a space and place of habitation. With sharp precision, Clare creates images that, given the sonnet's theme, should be blurred, slightly inaccessible or at worst, hermetic. Yet, with the power of dramatic cogency of stating the most rudimentary elements of Being, Clare propels the diction into an intellectual voice of haunting anguish, inertia, and depletedness with 'disillusioning clarity.'<sup>28</sup> The poem lacks any external scenes since any activity is confined to Clare's internal self.

With a sense of having outgrown life, Clare details his desire for flight from the limitations of what is to be found 'on the ground.' Nevertheless, he enacts his failure to achieve absolute transcendence that the Romantic imagination is able to apprehend; as the earth shows its dominating effect on the human once *thrown*:

Earth's prison chilled my body with its dram  
Of dullness, and my soaring thoughts destroyed,

(3-4)

Clare's psychological reality is synonymous with his existential reality. Earth is a prison that transformed his sublimeness into ordinariness and reduced his poetic elevation to the

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<sup>27</sup> Clare, *The Later Poems*, vol.1, 397-98.

<sup>28</sup> Helen Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) 93.

drudgery of its own reality and its woes. Existence has blocked glimpses of what might lie ‘beyond the realm of unmediated awareness.’<sup>29</sup> The ‘dullness’ (4) Clare speaks of in the ‘I am’ sonnet, has reference to his existential situatedness; a life situation in which he could see his desires wither like ‘.... nameless flowers that never meet the sun.’<sup>30</sup> In the presence of insignificance, but in the absence of praise outlined in the poem ‘Decay’, what must follow is the impact of existential despair. Disempowered, Clare comes to realise fully that he is to ‘plod upon the earth as dull and void’ (2).

The monosyllabic word ‘plod’ implies the heaviness of walking under a heavy weight that afflicts the bearer such as the soldiers ‘Bent double, like old beggars under sacks’, (1) in Wilfred Owen’s graphic episode of war.<sup>31</sup> The word is also anchored in the inferences of weight and burdensomeness. There is no mention of where he plods towards; he plods on rather than to somewhere. With the usual exactness that invigorates his observance of nature’s poetry, Clare says directly how his experience of life appears to him. The stylistic disparity comes only in the tone of voice, with its acceptance of self-expenditure. Plodding ‘as dull and void’ (2) is how he moved through the journey of existence. Without consciously invoking Dante’s *Inferno*, Clare invokes the poem’s visual presentation of people as living but dead; but for Clare who continually plods, there is no present help or relief in the form of Virgil. These concrete adjectives ‘dull’ and ‘void’ suggest the idea of Clare as a ghostly figure haunting his life. But the traumatic experience is not located here. It is to be found in the rigidity of life’s existential trajectory that has within it, no room for negotiation. Plodding ‘dull and void’ is what it is for Clare to be an ‘I am.’

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<sup>29</sup> Tim Chilcott, ‘A Real World & Doubting Mind’: *A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull UP, 1985) 202. Hereafter, ‘A Real World.’

<sup>30</sup> Clare, ‘Sunday Walks’, *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, vol.2, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 645-51 (650).

<sup>31</sup> Wilfred Owen, ‘Dulce Et Decorum Est’, *War Poems and Others*, ed. Dominic Hibberd (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973) 79.

The poet's failure to grasp the meaningfulness of life mobilised his instinct for flight. The impossibility to free oneself from the strongholds of life and its anguish is Clare's meaning as he writes:

I fled to solitudes from passions dream  
But strife pursued - .... (5-6)

The phrase 'passion's dream' speaks of all the poet's desires, hopes and wants drowned in the sea of disappointment. Leaving behind human experience, Clare 'Spurn[s] earth's vain and soul debasing thrall' (13). His reaffirmation of his ontological substance merely confirms him as a being, not a being in existence since, that existence has been rescinded and passed over to the realm between non-existence in existence and ontological impossibility. Clare distances himself from the idea of living in existence and re-announces his basic ontological signifier, 'I only know I am' (6). In light of the poem's stillness due to its overflowing momentum of inaction, the poem must move through the rise and fall of its metrical pace to achieve movement and progression. 'Clare provides an account in summarised form of his problematic reality and, at the same time, provides the poem with some sense of activity through the differing use of the past, present and conditional tenses:

I was a being created in the race  
Of men disdaining bounds of place and time: –  
A spirit that could travel o'er the space  
Of earth and heaven, – like a thought sublime,  
Tracing creation, like my maker, free, –  
(7-11)

The past tense articulates Clare's calm bitterness as he outlines his lofty beginnings when he was a being created rather than evolved or begot. Like a spirit just outside of the omnipresence God possesses, Clare, in the ontological state of poetic transcendence, could ignore the boundaries of time, space and place, and was free to discover the sublime

eminence of heaven and the mysteries of Earth. There is no blasphemy intended when he compares himself to his maker as Jesus does in the book of Philippians.<sup>32</sup> Clare, in experiencing external and inward light, was created free 'to be' and to be unhindered like God who is above life's drudgery. In his original spiritual capacity, 'Tracing creation (11)' for Clare, was the truth of his Being and his *raison d'être*.

Despite the considerable textual weight of existential surrender, the poem is mindful of its need to be a poem. Its alternating rhyme scheme helps the sonnet to benefit from animation, much needed in a context that is so devoid of movement. Rhyming against the passivity of the dissolution of the subject, the disenchantment of the poet which stems from losing what was sublime, fails to hinder the jauntiness of the poem's metre even 'at that moment, so dreadfully dark.'<sup>33</sup> The line 'A soul unshackled – like eternity' (12) emphasises Clare's original life-purpose and brings his poetic soliloquy to a close. 'Unshackled like eternity' presents eternity as being the ultimate form of freedom, the most immeasurable idea of time and space imaginable. Now in the 'Earth's prison' (3), and far from his own hermeneutic of freedom and what it means to be, Clare can only translate and re-imagine his previous state of Being. He knew what it was to be in that realm. Losing his former joy, he now announces '...I only know I am, that's all' (14). Clare has not forgotten 'Tracing his maker's creation (12), he does not say he has; nor does he reveal a refutation of his former glory. What he is subtly acknowledging, but at the same time not wanting to accept, is that he was not given a choice about inhabiting the dram of earth (3). Being *thrown* differentiates between his pre-ontological state and the un-extraordinary way of being he outlines in this poem of stagnation.

Like Milton's epic, Clare's *Paradise Lost*, is also a tragic narrative. Milton's dramatic outline in Book 1, lines 1-26 of Adam and Eve's loss, has the ability to be analysed, reasoned

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<sup>32</sup> *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*, 1790, Philippians Chapter 2 v 6.

<sup>33</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1, 465-69 (467).

and explained. They were cast out of Eden to the dullness of the Earth because of their disobedience. For Clare, and according to this sonnet, there is no explanation for his losing his magnificent past. He was created, was tracing creation and somehow, became dispossessed of his supernatural attributes. Thus, it is the helplessness and discernible sense of disenfranchisement that gives the poem its pathetic sentiment. He cannot mount an effective revolt against discontinuity so can 'only know[s] that he is – that's all' (14). This 'is' does not show movement only consciousness. It conveys function and progress from inertia to active thinking and self-recognition. Clare could no longer be found in his life; however, he would never become so deadened and so still that he would be beyond projecting his poetic possibilities.

Clare's 'Season in Hell'<sup>34</sup> began like Hölderlin's dark descent, which was long before he 'had been taken away into the protection of the night of madness.'<sup>35</sup> Whilst critics such as Evan Blackmore and Jonathan Bate cite numerous reasons for Clare's mental demise<sup>36</sup> psychology cannot be used to explain Clare's existential numbness. The transcendence of moving towards the Eternal meant that Clare was not 'reaching into the lit night of the psyche'<sup>37</sup> but undertaking an ontological shift. This parallels his journey into madness and helps to highlight the disclosedness in Clare, of an ontological uprooting which sees him positioned between Being and time.

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<sup>34</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, 'A Season in Hell' *Collected Poems*, Trans. Martin Sorrell, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 211-55.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted from Heidegger, 'The Origins of the Work of Art', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 15-88 (59).

<sup>36</sup> In his article 'John Clare's Psychiatric Disorder and Its Influence on His Poetry', *Victorian Poetry* 24.3 (1986): 209-88, *JSTOR*, 21/03/2010. Evan Blackmore cites intense misery, long episodes of melancholia (211) and bipolar manic depressive disorder (213) as reasons for Clare's madness. Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador-Pan Macmillan, 2004) 411, believes that Clare's "mania" is unlikely to have a single origin. Whatever genetic element there may or may not have been, there were also a variety of possible organic and environmental causes. A book entitled *Nervous and Mental Conditions*, published when Clare was in Dr Allen's asylum, listed the following among the many possible causes of madness: domestic disturbances and quarrels, disappointed love, sexual indulgence, love of admiration, fear, blows on the head, the witnessing of a sudden death, sudden and unexpected changes of fortune. Clare suffered from all these.'

<sup>37</sup> George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is there Anything in What We Say?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 80.

Nevertheless, Robert Jay Lifton helps to devise a language whereby Clare's existentialism of timelessness and 'moving beyond' can find expression. Lifton speaks of the Self breaking connections, overcoming and returning as a different self through psychic experiences that bring about inner change. However, Clare's experience is one of moving away from what existence has to offer and wanting to return to the idea of Self as a different being. Looking to what lay beyond death was not destructive for Clare. The ultimate consequence of suspending existential possibilities was that he was able to reach a new discovery of reality. That discovery was that there could be no home outside of poetry, and no other ontological base, could be made tenable outside of the declaration that repeats 'I feel I am, I only know I am.'

Feeling the pressure of life to keep him here 'plodding dull and void' (2) Clare disconfirms his place on the earth. In turn, he occupies a complete ontological vacuum in triumphant liberation as he moves to the place and space of the Eternal. Embracing the Eternal was not a visionary experience or an occurrence that was in the grasp of metaphor; it was the embodiment of what Clare unfolds in the organic and fluid assertion of a short and untitled poem:

O beneath such raptures in my forgetfull heart  
 That at that moment neath a oaks mossd bough  
 From all the world debard world forgot  
 I sat as happy at that time as if  
 Id just reciev'd existence & as if  
 The worlds[s] sad troubles & the world[s] rude spite  
 Had never never been<sup>38</sup>

This poem speaks and acts like the poem 'Ode' (1820) by John Keats<sup>39</sup> in light of the ecstasy generated by being in the presence of nature. Clare is in rapture from sitting underneath 'a

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<sup>38</sup> Clare, *Early Poems*, vol.1, 353. Dated 1819-20.

<sup>39</sup> Keats, 'Ode', *The Poems of John Keats*, 446-47.

oaks mossd bough' (2) and the peace it affords, whilst Keats' narrator is in momentary bliss from being 'Seated on Elysian lawns' (11):

Brows'd by none but Dian's fawns;  
Underneath large blue-bells tented,  
Where the daisies are rose-scented,  
And the rose herself has got  
Perfume which on earth is not;

(12-16)

However, this is only a distraction by beautiful poetry. Beyond the sensuous experience lies a vision that is Romantic in nature but exhibiting its own independent trajectory, that of 'going beyond.' In the midst of nature's wonderment, Clare's affinity to his earthly existence becomes detached as he plays out the paradox of leaving one *Being-in*, whilst occupying another. There is a marked occasion of change, a change in outlook, attitude, temperament and this reading suggests that it is because of a change in his way-to-be. He is apart from his past and from the world. The world has been forgotten and there is no trace or remembrance of it and its 'sad troubles' and 'rude spite' (6). It has been forgotten by his thinking and by his heart as if it 'Had never...been' (7).

Bearing out this chapter's thesis of Clare's simultaneous occupation of two ontologies, the poem also presents two events. Clare addresses a new existentialist experience in which he 'received existence' (5). This temporal sequence of 'going beyond' and progressing to 'moving beyond' lends authority to an ontologically transitioning poet. 'Just reciev[ing] existence' (5) is significant: the phrase does not speak of life beginning in a life that has yet to end; rather, Clare is referring to a new life brought about by suspending the

old. The poem performs a *Lichtung* which Heidegger defines as ‘To make something light, free and open...’<sup>40</sup>

‘A Vision’ (1844)<sup>41</sup> exhibits the desire for states of being beyond the world’s conventional orientation. What is initially striking about this poem is its refusal to occupy a generic space. It is unclear whether Clare is in confessional mode, or, whether he is speaking to himself through his own consciousness. What is also ambiguous is his ‘vision’, since he is not concerned to provide a transparent exposition, or to signify the vision’s location within the text.

Edward Strickland suggests that ‘A Vision’ be read with an awareness of the poem’s open roads that offer minimal signs and no definitive point of arrival. He writes, ‘A Vision’ should be approached ‘by viewing the poem from alternative biographical and generic perspectives, each of which presents its own internal ambiguities.’<sup>42</sup> To a great extent, Strickland’s demonstrates sagacity when he advises that biography should serve as a map to guide the reading experience. Losing love in the variety of ways Clare describes, in a tone that nurtures an objective account of emotional bereavement, is consistent with losing Mary, (9) losing the love of heaven (1) and his conviction that love kept its distance from him when he was distant from himself in the asylum (11-12). It is unequivocal that the poet is dismayed by love and, to give biography its place, Clare was also disillusioned with everything that was real. He would always be in love with a woman whom he could not have, would experience the keenness of poverty throughout his life; he hoped in vain to become aligned with London’s literati but would see his career dead and buried before he was.<sup>43</sup> But, as Strickland points out, biography is not the sole key to ‘A Vision.’ The ethos of the poem also concerns itself with its poetic purpose. With some reservation, I should like to subscribe to

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, Trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York; London: Harper and Row, 1972) 65. Please see *Glossary*.

<sup>41</sup> Clare, *The Later Poems*, vol. 1, 297.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Strickland, ‘Approaching A Vision’ *Victorian Poetry* 22 (1984): 229-45 (232).

<sup>43</sup> Ronald W. Link, *Toward the Abyss: Modern Elements in the Poetry of John Clare*, 1-304 (1).



Strickland's claim that 'The poem is a paean to the more extravagant pleasures of imagination, albeit those pleasures [that] are from normal reality and sought, with a desperate effort of transumption, only in dire straits indeed.'<sup>44</sup> Certainly Clare had a vision of utopia, but for him, it was not a vision of transumption. He had done more than imagined it, he had seen it, lived in it, had experienced Being in all of its ontological possibilities. Moreover, when Strickland declares Clare to be 'a poet who is himself reduced to a shadowy, spectral existence'<sup>45</sup> on account of his ontological resignation, such a precise observation in the poet's developmental continuity provides little room for it to be contended. However, it is when Strickland goes further in his understanding of Clare's experience which he describes as being 'more akin to a sense of transfiguration'<sup>46</sup> that we are able to sense a narrowing in the open roads. Strickland shows his perception of Clare's sense of flight but the present chapter's preferred interpretative emphasis is on a flight to, not a flight from.

Strickland offers two ways in which to read 'A Vision.' Firstly, through 'the venerable conventions of the dream vision'<sup>47</sup> which seems viable given the shapeless, timeless and spaceless features the poem vaunts. Nonetheless, when the critic builds on the idea of psychomachia to propose as his second possible genre, the convention of the quest, there is a sense that Strickland is leaning upon his own feeling of indeterminacy rather than the arbitrariness the poem presents. Even though Strickland admits the quest genre is 'compressed almost beyond recognition'<sup>48</sup> to maintain his position and discuss 'A Vision' within the context of quest is not to have grasped the raw sense of loss and victimisation of the poet by life as these lines exemplify:

I loved, but woman fell away;

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<sup>44</sup> Strickland, 'Approaching A Vision', 234.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 231.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 231.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 234.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*.

I hid me, from her faded fame:  
I snatch'd the sun's eternal ray, –  
And wrote 'till earth was but a name.

(9-12)

The poem echoes biographic detail in a most precise way and thus, is too real for it to be a dream vision and too listless to be considered as a quest poem because it does not have the energy. 'A Vision' also supports the chapter's reading which sees Clare moving into a different ontological realm where he will keep his 'spirit with the free' (16). His only foe will be hell (4) and from the sense of burden the poem bears, the word hell is either to be read as the traditionally received idea of the punishment for enjoying 'the sweets of fancied love' (3) or the existential ache that caused him to lose 'earth's joys (5) / And wrote 'till earth was but a name' (12).

Despite the poem's lethargy, there is a discernible sense of movement towards self-determination as Clare decides upon existential self-sequestration. Keeping his spirit with the free (16) is 'to be' in a place of freedom. This place was the Eternal where he could be 'The bard of immortality' (8). In the Eternal as place and ontological mood (or way 'to be') and as a result of Clare's ontological veering, the poet could be the 'unshackled soul' he speaks of in the sonnet 'I am.' As a being with a new 'I am-ness' existentially still, but untroubled, he could welcome the ontological numbness the 'I am' sonnet utters. Clare could also find homeness as a dweller in the Eternal, the paradise that could reflect the shadows of a more concrete reality.

'Spurn[ing] the lust, of earth below' (2), Clare's ontological translation to the Eternal consciously took place. His predicament of having no fixed point, in which the life of earth could correspond with him, could finally be resolved. This occurred imperceptibly as Clare managed to make the world go away. Yet, the Eternal as an ontological state and a place, can only become physical for Clare through contemplation and acts of poēsis.

Nevertheless, Clare wants to return to the Eternal as a being-with and yet transcend its terms. This impossible aspiration unfolds in ‘An Invite to Eternity’ (1847-48).<sup>49</sup> Clare’s appeal for company to share this habitat is carried out in a most wistful manner. Asking a maiden to go with him is Clare’s recognition of the impossibility of his question. The invitation to the maiden gives Clare’s poem the impression that it is a piece of writing preparing to travel. But this proposition is part hypothetical and part of Clare’s imagination that is being self-indulged. The proposition to the maiden can only be rhetorical because ‘To this strange death of life to be’ (18), Clare can and must go alone.

‘An Invite to Eternity’ is the poetic evocation of the pulse of *Being-in-the-world* coming through less clear and less determined in Clare; it conveys an ontological mood and place which is beyond the full development of Heidegger’s existential ontology. It is both a positive regression to the past where Clare was a travelling spirit with sublime thoughts, and a sad development for a being that constantly tried to enter into its own existence. The interpretive narrative of the poem in its macabre and melancholy tone, evokes how Clare dispossesses the ‘him’ from himself. As Clare moves to ‘The land of shadows...’ (25) the context for the event of Being will not be rescinded but unwilled. In his new ontological dwelling-in, there is a Heideggerian sense in the presence of death in Being. Here, however, it is more nuanced, more poetic and more individual than the generic discussion of *Dasein*’s ontological resolution (*Dasein* facing up to death). Death in the sense of the nullification of all ontological possibilities, hovers over the poem and presses from the poem’s contextual margins to present itself as a theme. However, death in this poem ‘cannot be understood as an opposite of life, it is in every instance a description of life itself’<sup>50</sup>:

Say maiden wilt though go with me  
In this strange death of life to be  
To live in death and be the same

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<sup>49</sup> Clare, *The Later Poems*, vol.1, 348-49.

<sup>50</sup> David C. Thomasma, ‘The Comatose Patient, the Ontology of Death, and the Decision to Stop Treatment’, *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 5.2 (1984): 181-96 (189).

Without this life, or home, or name  
At once to be, & not to be  
That was, and is not – yet to see

(17-22)

As Chilcott observes, ‘there is a comparable confrontation with possibility of nothingness instead of being.’<sup>51</sup> The willingness to be severed from something perceptible, to something that offers oblivion, is said without reservation. It is interesting to note that Clare’s invitation to the maiden to ‘go’ somewhere is not an invitation to travel. He is inviting her to ‘To live in death and be the same / Without this life, or home, or name’ (19-20). It is an invitation ‘At once to be, & not to be’ (21) without an awareness of self as a discernible identity. This prospect of being alive in death may seem grim, but in...‘the land of shadows (25)...Where there’s nor life nor light to see’ (7), the frustration of *Dasein* ‘being there’ is slightly alleviated by the mystery of something ‘yet to see.’ The impasse and void of a paused existence is the poem itself. The diction also seems to thrive on non-definition and since death is the same as life, it also thrives on imperceptibility. However, meaning is signified ‘when the poem looks back upon its own articulation.’<sup>52</sup>

The intent of the poem is clear as it reiterates the sad and pathetic knowledge of there being only one existential option for the human condition that, consequently, will disallow the individual to escape [life] or clear up [its] mystery.<sup>53</sup> Rather than remain in the desperate irony of being alive within his existential and ontological death, Clare is prepared to become harmonised with a place and ontology that is a subversion of his beloved natural world:

Through the valley depths of shade  
Of night and dark obscurity  
Where the path has lost its way  
Where the sun forgets the day

(3-6)

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<sup>51</sup> Chilcott, ‘A Real World’, 204.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 203.

<sup>53</sup> Paraphrased from Mournier, *Existentialist Philosophies*, 38.

It seems that Clare's paradise will not be an improvement on the world and its 'frost.... that freezes life to stone.'<sup>54</sup> It is dark, full of night and scary. However, Clare is using the ultimate expressiveness of poetry to speak in analogical terms of his journey through life while on the earth.

'An Invite to Eternity' speaks of that ontological place where an individual exists as an absence of life living in the 'worldhood of the world'<sup>55</sup> rather than 'life as a temporarily successful overcoming of non-being.'<sup>56</sup> As Clare speaks to the maiden describing and explaining the geo-physicality of the Eternal, the viability of the poet simply trying to make his invitation more appealing, seems to be a productive ploy. However, this idea does not prove to be long lasting on account of Clare continuing to describe this non-earthly place as a frightening 'land of shadows' (25):

Where stones will turn to flooding streams  
Where plains will rise like ocean waves  
Where life will fade like visioned dreams  
And mountains darken into caves  
Say maiden wilt though go with me

(9-13)

The Eternal is not a place where Clare will meet oblivion. He will walk to a place where 'Things pass like shadows.... (23, / Where parents live and are forgot / And sisters live and know us not' (15-16). He will also walk without the maiden since an individual's life has the ontological quality of *mineness*, that is to say, it cannot be shared vicariously. His existence within the human condition will become terminated. His ontological transference to the Eternal is a modifier of life where Clare would no longer experience '.....the past and present all as one' (28).

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<sup>54</sup> Clare, 'Child Harold', *The Later Poems*, vol.1, 49.

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 114:83.

<sup>56</sup> David C. Thomasma, 'The Comatose Patient', 184.

From the discourse of his native and natural places as an eternal Eden, it perhaps would not be a misreading to say that Clare, finally and eternally, will be re-united with the space and place that was lost. He would also re-gain his pre-enclosure identity as an individual satisfying every connotation of the words home, settlement and belonging in a cohesive world where relative coherence could be gained. Thus, he would no longer be in need of, or have to exist in, his post-enclosure 'sad non-identity' (14).

An alternative interpretation that would want to translate Clare being wed to Eternity (32) through the religious conceptions of resurrection and the after-life seems misplaced here because Clare is not discussing his death 'as the absence of life, but as an ontological move 'To join the living with the dead' (30). 'An Invite to Eternity' is an invite from Clare to himself to begin life in his paused ontology or, in other words, to begin his existential death through an ontological continuum and through a relationship with life.<sup>57</sup> His stay in the world as an inhabitant had been relinquished and Clare came to the point of self-realisation whereby he saw that there was nothing to be lost when all about him was loss. 'Still he did live till real life seemd as gone / And his soul lingerd in a shadowd one.'<sup>58</sup>

The inner recording of his sense of existential destitution displays his conscious artistry. Clare's shift to the ontological mood of un-Being validates his writing as reflective and makes his arrival as an *essential* poet 'a purer arrival.'<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Paraphrased from David C. Thomsma, 'The Comatose Patient', 184.

<sup>58</sup> Clare, 'The Fate of Genius: A Tale', *Early Poems*, vol.2, 66-70 (69).

<sup>59</sup> Paraphrased from Heidegger, 'What are Poets For?', 139.

## Chapter Eight

### **Existential Ontology in two Philosophical Poets: Wordsworth and Clare**

Introducing the case for ‘the persistence of Romanticism’, Richard Eldridge<sup>1</sup> provides a broad and yet detailed account of theories and those critics who denounce Romanticism as a way of living through and experiencing the world. He discusses the accusation of Carl Schmitt who uses the phrase ‘subjective occasionalism’ to criticise Romanticism for its overt subjectivism<sup>2</sup> and highlights a second, more serious criticism that stems from Romanticism’s aptitude of ‘splendid isolation’ as a way of being. Romanticism, he writes, evades ‘the social....and social order [that] is suffused with opposition and antagonism.’<sup>3</sup> The vilification continues in the caustic tone of Marjorie Levinson. Levinson sees literary Romanticism as a movement that is undiscerning of the political and uses its fictive resources to be essentially non-relational to, and non-involved in, the influence of socio-political dynamics of *everydayness*.

Yet, it becomes feasible to analyse and mount a possible defence for the conceptions and empirical approach that typify the ethos of emotional intellectualism that lies at the heart of Romanticism. Romanticism signals to Being to be ever present as a series of becomings. These becomings have their roots in an inward vision but become significant to what resides within the extrinsic because they mobilise existential thinking and thinking about place, a

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature*, Modern European Literature, ed. Richard Eldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001). Hereafter, Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism*.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Schmitt writes ‘Refusing to acknowledge the demands that reality places upon thought, [the Romantics] see the world as but the occasion for the artistic mind to assert its sovereignty. Reality counts only as the pretext for the imagination to express itself, to make up how it would like things to be, to “aestheticize.”’ Quoted by Eldridge in Introduction to *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature*, 5. Quoted from Charles Larmore, *The Romantic Legacy* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996) 4, who is citing Carl Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1919) 24.

<sup>3</sup> Eldridge, Introduction, *The Persistence of Romanticism*, 6.

sense of place and belonging. The corollary of this is that Romanticism responds to an unimagined actuality by means of its transcendent rhetoric. Its focus is on what constitutes the fully human, questing after possibilities. Thus, the accusations of a lack of engaged historicity and social conflict, become undermined when they are set against the desire of Romanticism to have the individual avoid dejection and valuelessness. To envision an existence free of authoritative conventions, and to achieve a palpable sense of self-autonomy, is one of the paramount characteristics of Romanticism. It is in this way that Eldridge illustrates Romanticism's persistence in the face of the on-going violence against it.

Eldridge's contention would have been made more fertile if he had looked to that Romantic poetic mind that best endorses and encapsulates the life, conscious of its Being and its habitation of reality. Amongst the six most notable Romantics, William Wordsworth is the poet whose work yields most productively to the theories and thinking that constitutes the shifting paradoxes and dialectical movement of philosophy. His attention to a 'sense of how the mind's relation to the external world might best be understood'<sup>4</sup>, together with the human relationship with nature, supply the basis for his 'philosophic song.'<sup>5</sup> Across his creative lifetime, Wordsworth returned repeatedly to meditations on such topics as the relation of human Beings to their world, the formation of moral development and the core values which gives life its worth.<sup>6</sup> In his literariness, Wordsworth's 'philosophical reflectiveness becomes situated as an expression of particular responsiveness to the general human problem of leading a life authentically in its awareness of deep necessities, rather than only conventionally and mechanically.'<sup>7</sup> The internal movement within Wordsworth's poetry is conveyed through images that lend themselves to philosophical appropriations and abstractions. In Wordsworth's work, poetry and philosophy do not 'quarrel.'

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<sup>4</sup>Stephen Gill, 'The Philosophic Poet', *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 142-60 (157). Hereafter, 'The Philosophic Poet.'

<sup>5</sup> Gill, 'The Philosophic Poet', 157.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> 'Internal Transcendentalism', *The Persistence of Romanticism*, 106.



The chapter's aspiration is to consider some of Clare's philosophical verse in the interest of the conviction that Clare, like Wordsworth, was not writing within a recognised philosophical tradition and yet asks to be read in relation to systematic philosophies. A discourse with its own agency is produced by the two poets that reads as a philosophy of existential temporariness. Both poets demonstrate a comparable intent, for all their differences. 'Whilst Clare's poetry is a less intellectualized alternative'<sup>8</sup> to Wordsworth's 'both poets dramatize a human confrontation with the natural world'<sup>9</sup> coupled with the nature of human life. If Wordsworth is a philosophical poet, and if Clare attends to the same concerns, what can be perceived is further validation of Clare's Schillerian Sentimentalism.

Wordsworth's Romantic imagination asks the same four questions that have been formulated by Kant's metaphysical investigations<sup>10</sup> and makes an instructive point of comparison with Clare's own dealings with philosophy as a test case. Caution must be exercised, however, in asserting any conviction that Wordsworth follows particular philosophies. Entering into this type of enterprise is to take a route that would lead to a partially reductive endeavour. Although there are definite associative references to Plato, Aristotle, Kierkegaard and Descartes in Wordsworth,<sup>11</sup> it is important not to move away from the lake poet's own poetic reality and philosophy of nature which is, Gill considers, 'a scheme in itself.'<sup>12</sup> Wordsworth's writings are sometimes abstract in their poetic intent.

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<sup>8</sup> W. J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1980) 41. Hereafter, *The Poetry of Nature*.

<sup>9</sup> W. J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Kant's metaphysical enquiries known in German as 'Die Kantischen Fragen' asks four basic questions regarding humanity. (1) 'What can I know?' (Epistemology), (2) 'What should I do?' (Ethics), (3) 'What can I hope for?' (Religion) and (4) 'What is Man?' (Anthropology).

<sup>11</sup> For more detailed reading on this subject, see Lorne John Forstner, *A Study of the Psycho-Philosophical Origins of the Romantic Imagination*, PhD thesis, (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 1969) Ann Arbor: UMI, 1969, ATT 7013313, Daniel Nelson, *Wordsworth: Visionary Poet of the Natural World*, MA Thesis. (Buffalo: State University of New York, 2011) Ann Arbor: UMI, 2011, ATT 1500491, Paul H. Fry, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008), Alan Grob, *The Philosophic Mind: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry and Thought* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1973), Newton Phelps Stallknecht, *Strange Seas of Thought: Studies in William Wordsworth's Philosophy of Man and Nature* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1958).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Gill, 'The Philosophic Poet', *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 142-60 (148). Hereafter, 'The Philosophic Poet.'

However, they offer epistemologies that are too limited to be located within established philosophical conversations that produce arguments of reason. They are wholly internal considerations, self-cultivations which are bound up with what Heidegger has described as components of *Dasein*'s ontological existentials and its *being-in-the-world*. The poetry must not become submerged in the thought of 'star theorists.'<sup>13</sup> Wordsworth's poetry is not subordinate to grand philosophical epistemes. His philosophical verse 'carries Truth "alive into the heart of passion"'<sup>14</sup> and leads to an altogether different poeticised dianoetic.

Coleridge was disappointed when his expectations for Wordsworth to become 'the first & greatest philosophical poet'<sup>15</sup> and to create a system of philosophy did not materialise. Wordsworth, instead, chose to be inspired by certain aspects of philosophy, existential and ontological in nature, in order to bring to the fore questions about poetry, life and society. Nevertheless, his context for thinking is always a poetic one.

The poet's 'conscious articulation of his know[ledge] of the intrinsic value of the different objects of human pursuit'<sup>16</sup> that underpins his 'literary philosophy' is at the heart of Wordsworth's poetic vocation. As Stephen Gill affirms, Wordsworth writes philosophical poetry 'because it deals with central things, the great, elemental passions of our existence.'<sup>17</sup> Writing poetry that illumines 'Romanticism's....continuous awareness of the local and the temporal situatedness of human thought, ....so that human thought is typically represented as occasioned by specific places....including an awareness of its own temporal development,'<sup>18</sup> is the essence of the movement's link with the world. Thus, to say that Wordsworth energises the fecund interplay between philosophy and poetry is completely operable. Intentionally or

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<sup>13</sup> Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophical Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 7. Hereafter, *Wordsworth's Song*.

<sup>14</sup> Gill, 'The Philosophic Poet', 155.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Letter to Richard Sharp' dated 15 January, 1804, quoted from *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1801-1806*, 6 vols, (vol.2), ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) 1031-35 (1034).

<sup>16</sup> Taylor Coleridge, 'Letter to Richard Sharp', vol.2, 1033.

<sup>17</sup> Gill, 'The Philosophic Poet', 155.

<sup>18</sup> Eldridge, 'Internal Transcendentalism', *The Persistence of Romanticism*, 106.

unintentionally, Wordsworth's reflections in nature are patent and 'indicate how securely he was working within a tradition of meditative verse.'<sup>19</sup> The humanistic awareness found in his existential ruminations is what animates the philosophical substance in poetic evocations such as 'Old Man Travelling' (1800), 'Lines written in Early Spring' (1798) and 'Expostulation and Reply' (1798 ).<sup>20</sup> Wordsworth's philosophical fluency is to be found in his poetry's commentary on 'the magic [and misery] of everyday life.'<sup>21</sup>

Wordsworth writes through varying forms of nature which triumphantly unite the individual and the voice of nature speaking. Hence, it would be quite legitimate to claim that Wordsworth's poetry is one that provides inside detail in regards to the social unity of humanity. There are moments, however, when Wordsworth plunges the individual into creative tensions in order to bring forth internal scenes of life which are made all the darker as they are contrasted against the 'paradisial realm'<sup>22</sup> of nature's phenomena. It is not unusual for Wordsworth to write from an abstract basis in order to present the turbulence and complication that comes from being afflicted by the involuntariness of life. 'Old Man Travelling'<sup>23</sup> awakens the Romantic conception of the individual and its aloneness whilst also managing to illustrate the Romantic sense of reverence for humanity and nature. In its depiction of the human journey, 'the old man's' character walks along life's dusty road towards the inevitability of existential and emotional conflict. His journey from birth to death or what Heidegger terms as 'the possibility of the absolute impossibility of *Dasein*'<sup>24</sup> can be known in his continued walking. Here, Wordsworth uses philosophy to examine in poetry, measurements of humanness and the conceptualisation of beings and their becomings. What

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<sup>19</sup> Gill, 'The Philosophic Poet', 143.

<sup>20</sup> William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill, The Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984). Hereafter, *Wordsworth: Major Works*.

<sup>21</sup> Eldridge, Introduction, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Tim Chilcott, 'A Real World & Doubting Mind': *A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull UP, 1985) 56. Hereafter, 'A Real World.'

<sup>23</sup> Wordsworth, *Wordsworth: Major Works*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294:251.

is also perceived is the dialectic of inner reality of the individual and the contingency of the presence of the present as it comes to bear on *being-in-the-world*. As well as representing existential tribulations and ontological possibilities, the old man suggests co-existence with the potentialities of the environment.

Alongside his philosophical contemplations Wordsworth's Romantic sensibility is eager to affirm the significance and presence of nature as a medium in which reflection and self-reflection are able to take place. It is because of the tranquillity of nature that bears down upon his walk that 'the old man' is able to think and 'move.... with thought' (6-7). The peace inherent in nature, prompts 'the old man' to cast off what he now 'hardly feels' (14). This reluctance of 'the old man' to speak sees Wordsworth allowing the poem to find its own determination and meaning.

'The little hedge-row birds' (1) that 'peck along the road' (2) frame the idea of Romanticism in nature, of transcending the natural order to become a part of an unimagined freedom. The birds continue to be beings in Being as they aid the suspending of epistemological concerns and augment the efficacy of the poetic. Ignoring 'the old man', they contribute to the natural scene, whilst providing the contrasting image of an image which is not itself an image, but a representative of what is able to transcend art.

The 'old man' walks and is 'insensibly subdued / To settled quiet' (7-8). As well as describing how he travels and moves his limbs 'in one expression' (4), Wordsworth also highlights the lack of oppressive human qualities that does not constrain his mental disposition or his resoluteness to keep on travelling. 'The old man' shows no regard or need for patience, or to make any effort to appeal to what can be found externally. 'He is by Nature led' (12). Wordsworth's poetic philosophy moves closer to the surface of something apparent, something distinct, to function as a coherent approach to Romantic ontology as 'the old man' continues to travel. The poet's philosophical reflectiveness, is situated as a

continual appeal to humanity to acknowledge, the great conventions in life without having such conventions having mastery over the life lived. His vital point that stands between the philosophical and the literary delivers the thought that the individual's mode of *being-in-the-world* should resist the de-limiting power of *The They*<sup>25</sup> who only achieve generality and seek to reinforce the already established. Heidegger's concept of *The They*, produces the ontological state of *Fallenness* within *there being*, moving it away from itself. The character of the old man reveals a mindfulness of his own human understanding and human interpretation which suggests that its source is an individualistic philosophical system. Wordsworth determines that 'the old man' asks no questions but has responses to questions he is asked that come wholly from 'The Itself' of his mental self-rule. His responses to the narrator are without guile and emotional implosion; and they are offered within the context of the harmony of an internal mind in accord with the peace inducing environment.

In 'Lines written in Early Spring'<sup>26</sup> what comes to the fore is nature as a medium of inspiration for feelings and thoughts to be stimulated. Nature, is also functioning in a pedagogic mode, as it directs and incites active thoughts. The poem begins with the significance of perceiving and absorbing the aesthetic and the beautiful. The voice wants to step outside of human experience to appreciate the possible condition of an Elysium. These moments when Wordsworth's speaker 'hears[s] a thousand blended notes' (1) and 'Through primrose-tufts, in that sweet bower' (9), are moments when reality's demand on thought is unapprehended. In these moments, he cannot reach the knowledge of the birds. Knowledge in these moments is a superfluous materiality. Nor is it to be shared because the sensibility is too bound up in the pleasure of 'The budding twigs [that] spread out their fan, / To catch the breezy air' (17-18).

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<sup>25</sup> Please see *Glossary*.

<sup>26</sup> Wordsworth, *Wordsworth: Major Works*, 80-81.

Nonetheless, when ‘In that sweet mood...’ (3) where ‘The periwinkle trailed its wreaths (10), sad thoughts come to the speaker’s mind (4). Through the depths of nature’s immense beauty, the speaker’s pleasurable reflections are abruptly interrupted as dark thoughts are aroused which are anomalous to the external arcadia. The physical space becomes an oxymoronic event as the speaker’s heart is grieved ‘to think / What man has made of man’ (8). These brooding thoughts stem from the desire in Wordsworth’s ‘Nature philosophy’ for humanity to be cherished by humanity and to mean something to itself. The sum of humanity must be more than an ontological phenomenon that is capable of inhumanity. Hence, Wordsworth’s speaker expresses painful concern in the knowledge that humanity has the ability to depreciate, degrade and denigrate the idea that Emmanuel Levinas espouses in the ethos of ‘the other.’<sup>27</sup> Humanity has not only perverted its own nature but is, essentially, devaluing its own Being by discounting the innate connection to the nature which, according to Wordsworthian philosophy, is able to teach humanity the merits of a harmonized and ethical existence. It is during the time that the voice is admiring nature’s ‘fair works’ (5) that the actions of thinking and articulating thoughts regarding the human condition become mobilised.

Wordsworth’s philosophical thinking here, is a Romantic appeal to existential ontology, to the idea that in life ‘there [is] pleasure there’ (20). If this is not something that the human experience can realise, if the human experience cannot be awakened, ennobled, developed or be orientated to a future with possibilities by the edification that is to be found in the sublime and the beautiful, then the voice of Wordsworth’s speaker is to be heeded when moved to utter, ‘Have I not reason to lament / What man has made of man?’ (23-24).

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<sup>27</sup> Levinas derives the primacy of his ethics from the experience of the encounter with ‘the Other.’ For Levinas, the irreducible relation, the epiphany, of the face to face, the encounter with another, is a privileged phenomenon in which the other person’s proximity and distance are both strongly felt. This, in essence, is the thesis of *Totality and Infinity: An essay on Exteriority*, Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969).

Wordsworth's considerations are a spirited humanistic challenge that is no less significant to an individual's processes of recognition, cognition and action.

In what seems to be an antithetical move against a philosophical disposition 'Expostulation and Reply' <sup>28</sup> presents a robust picture of cognitive dissonance in Wordsworth's thinking. The poem initially presents itself as endorsing intellectual and academic routes to knowledge:

Where are your books? That light bequeathed  
To beings else forlorn and blind!  
Up! Up! and drink the spirit breathed  
From dead men to their kind.

(5-8)

Not to be separated from the analogous theme of intellectualism that is also addressed in 'The Tables Turned' (1798), 'Expostulation and Reply' is an extension of the discourse on knowledge and how it is acquired. This topic is conjoined with the question of the nature of the stimulus that directs us to think. It appears that the fusing of education and nature is indeed 'turned upon' as the intellectual orientation of 'Expostulation and Reply' sets itself up as a disparate and discordant view against the tutelage of nature and its composite guides on morality. The time that Wordsworth sits 'on that grey old stone (1)...look[ing] round on [his] mother earth / As if she for no purpose bore [him]' (9-10) is interpreted by the speaker as time ill spent since it will yield nothing. Sitting on the grey stone contemplating the world, its ways and its inhabitants for 'the length of half a day' (2), will fail to incite and stir the grey matter. Accessing information in an attempt to later on apply the processes of understanding, is for the speaker to be conducted through the conventions of a priori knowledge. Thus, he depicts Wordsworth's endeavours as misdirected and infertile and summarises the poet's

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<sup>28</sup> Wordsworth, *Wordsworth: Major Works*, 129-30.

efforts as ‘dream’[ing] his time away’ (4). Books are the source of ‘light’ (5), without them .... ‘beings [are] else forlorn and blind!’ (6).

Wordsworth’s response sounds out his individualistic philosophical discernments. Wordsworth’s response to his ‘good friend Matthew’ (15) has been documented by his biographers as having its roots in a conversation with the philosopher William Hazlitt who ‘was somewhat unreasonably attached to modern books of moral philosophy.’<sup>29</sup> Stephen Gill writes that because ‘Hazlitt records that he “got into a metaphysical argument with Wordsworth”....., it seems possible that it was Hazlitt he [Wordsworth] had in mind.’<sup>30</sup> Wordsworth does not revert back to what he believed in ‘The Tables Turned’ because it becomes apparent that he did not leave the ideas that are based on the interconnection between the intimate fusing of nature and education. Affirming the power of the sensory, and the unframed omnipotence of phenomenology as an approach to the ontic, Wordsworth’s mini homily attests to the Romantic ethos of the individual’s power. Knowledge does not have to come as it were, from a secondary source that brings with it, its own style or theories. For Wordsworth, and the thinking that is inherent within literary Romanticism, knowledge is everywhere. It could be argued quite justifiably against Wordsworth that there is something Lockean and something of Hume in his answer. However, it is Wordsworth’s conviction or rather, his nature philosophy, which asserts the alternative idea regarding how one is to obtain knowledge. Knowledge comes to the individual from a self-surrendering to what surrounds them. The assimilation and processing of what comes to the individual passively, in a pervasive stillness, is the essence of Wordsworth’s epistemological beliefs. This is shown in Wordsworth’s response:

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 139.

<sup>30</sup> Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, 139. Gill cites this reference from the Azariah Pinney Papers, Bristol University Library, dated 2 May 1793.



The eye it cannot chuse but see,  
We cannot bid the ear be still;  
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,  
Against, or with our will.

Nor less I deem that there are powers,  
Which of themselves our minds impress,  
That we can feed this mind of ours,  
In a wise passiveness.

(17-24)

The actualising of verbs to do with looking, seeing, hearing and feeling forms a perfect antithesis to Matthew's expostulation. The impact that books and academic learning have is an experience that leads to a directionless path and is also fraught with futility, a 'forever seeking':

Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum  
Of things for ever speaking,  
That nothing of itself will come,  
But we must still be seeking?

(25-28)

Wordsworth's philosophical reasoning rests on the stillness of the environment, the motionlessness of words and the calmness of the mind. In this state of Being, the individual will find life sweet and know not why (14).

Hence, it is possible to claim that Wordsworth's individual innovative imagination can be afforded its own hermeneutic and be discussed as a philosophical position that uses the educating power of nature as its main coordinate. What Wordsworth does on behalf of Romanticism, is to reveal to humanity that it is able to transcend the concept Heidegger terms the 'worldhood of the world.'<sup>31</sup> It is Wordsworth's belief in humanity and his desire for humanity to have a higher consciousness to explore fully in a Kantian sense, what can be

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<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 91:63.

known, what can be achieved, what can be hoped for and ultimately what am I? Wordsworth's self-determination freely discloses alternative possibilities. It allows humans to experience their freedom as they continue to initiate new beginnings through a series of enlightened becomings. It is these occasions of spirited difference that move Stephen Gill to write: 'What continues to strike me as the dominant characteristic of Wordsworth's philosophic verse overall,...is that the poetry shifts continually on the axis between the exultantly affirmative and the hesitantly exploratory.'<sup>32</sup> Wordsworth's choices of poetic forms and the cadences of his metrical practices, which Brennan O'Donnell attends to in a detailed study,<sup>33</sup> also release a flow of cogent and nuanced semantic implications. With his focus on the subjective individual, a focus that eschews solipsism, Wordsworth makes possible not only the associative practice of philosophy and poetry, but also creates a route to the accession of existential meaningfulness.

The philosophical dimension that displays itself in Clare bears much similitude with the philosophical concerns that are to be found in Wordsworth. Philosophical apprehensions are shared between both poets. Assuredly, these concerns are expressed in different poetic forms, rationales and differing frustrations. Yet, at the poetic core, there is a metaphysical and existential presence which draws out ideas that have received a much fuller treatment by luminous philosophical voices. Wordsworth promotes and appeals to the individual's capacity to perceive sensory data that has a pedagogic function. Clare presents an experiential philosophy that does not seek authentication as a technical or systematic theory. Its authentication stems from the premise that his philosophy has been 'lived.' Clare's philosophical leanings show their difference from Wordsworth's on account of his looking inward. Whilst nature is a medium of edification for Wordsworth, for Clare, the inevitable existential interrogatives and its greatest revelations do not come from without but from

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<sup>32</sup> Gill, 'The Philosophical Poet', 152-53.

<sup>33</sup> Brennan O'Donnell, *The Passion of Metre: A Study of Wordsworth's Metrical Art* (Kent: Kent State UP, 1995).

within. Clare understood nature as having a mysterious functioning; it seduced his senses and prompted him to look at the Being of the essentia and Being itself. His looking developed into an intimate relationship with nature and, in turn, the woodlands, heaths and waters of Helpston shaped Clare's ontological mood. Nature also became a solace for Clare against *The They* and the frequent moments when he took true measure of the dimension of his existence when the gravity of life erodes and crumbles.

The nature of Clare's human landscape does not accommodate a terrain in which revelations of universal applications are able to be realised. His philosophical meditations disseminate as an authoritative lived philosophy whose main image is a poet accepting the human imperative of being himself. His philosophical verse probes a continuous 'failing to become.' Like Wordsworth's, Clare's philosophical verse is directed towards the human vocation and the purpose of human life. Yet, in contrast with Wordsworth, the individual in Clare cannot transform the world in order to see a new world through the power of the imagination. The possibility of this higher order of experience is, in Clare, crowded out by the ontologically chaotic.

Writing about Clare within the context of Heidegger and Romanticism allows for questions about what type of poet is Clare when set against the other Romantics such as Wordsworth. This provides a different interpretation of Clare within the context of Romanticism when he grapples with issues of Being. Secondly, it raises for purposes of re-discussion, reservations about the propriety of regarding Clare within a philosophical frame of reference. In relation to both points, what Stephen Gill writes of Wordsworth can also be said for Clare which is, that Wordsworth writes poetry that 'is at least what [Wallace] Stevens calls "poetry of thought"' <sup>34</sup> which sets up a re-thinking of Clare that further enables him as a sentimental (Schillerian) thinking poet. Therefore, since both poets ultimately poeticize

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

Being, Harold Bloom's opinion of Clare as a 'Wordsworthian shadow'<sup>35</sup> perhaps needs de-stabilising.

Unlike Wordsworth, who at times does not benefit from being read through philosophical ideologies, Clare's philosophical verse becomes illuminated from being discussed within, or from, the context of elective philosophical ideas namely those of Heidegger. The philosopher, with his ideas of Being and beings in time, is important for Clare because he helps bring into focus the marginalised features of Clare's poetry that are wholly concerned with poetry as empty texts, having their own properties, *being-in-the-world* and the ways in which Clare uses the verb 'be.' The philosopher also proves germane to Clare on another level. Heidegger's study of *Dasein* and its existentiell modes of Being emphasises his portrayal of life which, in its disinclination to synthesize tensions, is different from the Romantics. It is in this way that a Heideggerian context for Clare is germane. Clare's portrayal of 'dirty reality', conveyed through his lived philosophy, is creative but un-invented. In contrast, Romanticism has the propensity to transcend *everydayness* through imaginative channels. This different aspect proves to be significant when discussing Clare within a Romantic context. Clare's difference from the Romantics lies in his relationship with Being and his artistic ontology. Clare's response to nature, combined with his presentation of his own inner nature, highlights the need for critics to use what the poetry yields in and of itself.

Like Wordsworth, Clare considers nature, the nature of Being and the nature of human Being. But unlike Heidegger, Clare's premise does not comprise a pure ontology. The poem 'Nothingness of Life' (1822)<sup>36</sup> is less concerned with self-realisation than with world weariness. Its tone 'is knowing', predicating its grasp of the experiential. Within its framing

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<sup>35</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961) 437.

<sup>36</sup> John Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, 5 vols (vol. 4), eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 278.

of what is perceptible as the constant evolution of static, the poem projects the thought that linguistic structures (especially nouns and their associations), lose their efficacy but not their proficiency to represent their innate purposes. 'The venerable tree' does not pine away to 'nothingness & dust' (1-2) and 'the vain shades of Ruins' that he 'never see[s]' (3), are temporary manifestations of the ontic that have 'pined away to nothingness' (2). And yet, this is only temporary. Their vain shades of power are seen in [a] cheerless light' (6) but become resurrected by 'warm reflection' (5). Clare's philosophical discerning is perceptible through the coalescence of his intelligent observations and his reflective thinking. He 'views lifes vanity in cheerless light' (6) because it is insipid and does not carry within it, the possibility for anything that is pleasurable. This leads him to write of the only way that humankind is able to hope and see 'the pictures of life's early day' (9). Humankind must accept that reality is never a final reality, since the reality that life is able to offer, falls into 'nothingness' but returns again and again for another beginning. However, this beginning is perhaps different, but not new. It is mentally reflected as a state of impressions that do not bring any measure of satisfaction.

The temporariness of life's reality is both a becoming, in Heideggerian terms, and one that becomes. It does not remain as a becoming, alive with potential, possibilities and the vitality of conjecture. Reality becomes an a priori reality, devoid of the 'glimmering of pleasure springs' (11); and when says Clare, it extends into the realm of maturation, it becomes nothing and 'Burst[s] into the emptiness of lost delight' (8). To regain its worth and significance, reality must develop into a becoming that transforms into a 'became.' It is this temporariness where nothing is solidified and permanent that causes the things of earth to be 'lost delight[s]' (8). In this incessant continuation of moments that can only be lived in the realm of the abstract and the imitations of the past, life and its images lose their ability to satisfy.

The existential inertia that crawls all over the poem, derives from the inconsequential and insubstantial feeling that in life, there is nothing there. Thus, it falls on the poet to shatter and dissipate the emptiness of the excellent fiction that has registered itself as life. But Clare's attempt to purge life of its elegiac disposition, and reconstruct its call to the human to live in it fully, falls short. 'Life's mortal things' (13) and the 'reflections of earths vanity' (12) are phrases which confirm life's nothingness. The poem indicates that this is not the first time that Clare comes to 'know' this. He knows that what he sees, and what is on offer from the world and its worldliness, do not belong to this time or a time to come. It is to enrich the interim and then be no more 'Like evenings striding shadows [that] haste away' (10). It is his knowing, his expectation that reality will again become an outworn reality, which energises the need for his imagination and the pictures it produces to be made real.<sup>37</sup> Once this event becomes a reality in itself, Clare however, 'pines & sickens oer lifes mortal things' (13) and as they 'become' they become nothing to him.

The last line of the poem takes the form of a revelation that sees Clare discarding the ever present sense of becoming, temporariness and desiring not something more, but something else. The 'relish for eternity' can be read as longing for death to enact the releasing of the existential blandness in which Clare lives life. But what seems to emerge, is a deeply personal need for the present to be made real and Clare not having to feel like a false seer in the sense that he can predict what will come because he has seen it already. The prevailing sense of the shallowness of things must be stopped; the ontological must come out of the darkness of fabrication and into its ability to be beyond images and metaphor. It must validate itself with its own existential significance.

As Clare asks 'Is there another world for this frail dust / To warm with life & be itself again' (1-2) the empty semblances, and the wanting for something else, show their contiguity

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<sup>37</sup> This is similar to Shelley early on in 'Defence of Poetry', the idea that language loses its creativity and has to be renewed by new poets.

with 'Nothingness of Life.' 'The Instinct of Hope' (1823)<sup>38</sup> to which these lines belong, are a continuation of what Clare feels after the reflected images of life have been stripped away, leaving his desire for 'another world' (1) even more acute. Clare's philosophical acumen and his aptitude for abstract and metaphysical thinking are evident in this poem. They reveal a consciousness that is firmly rooted in the fate of humankind and the mystery surrounding it. The sonnet takes upon itself a venture, which in the context of its tempo-spatial framework, would seem too crowded for its form. But 'The Instinct of Hope' inquires, ponders and broods in a chiasmic style that accommodates the sonnet's grand ambition. The poem's character is one of anti-multiplicity. The momentum that is created from the shift from the subjective to the objective is the impulse that fosters the poem's sense of control.

The aestheticised philosophy and the pure poetry of the opening sentence give impetus to what follows. The agenda of 'The Instinct of Hope' is essentially twofold. Clare should like to know answers to why....'every thing seems struggling to explain / The close sealed volume of its mystery' (7-8). And secondly, will all humanity die without having known these mysteries one of which is, will there be 'a second spring [?]'

Wordsworth seeks a philosophical unity between nature and the human conscience. Clare seeks to open up his understanding to the imbalance between what is abstract and what should not be abstract within the human experience. There is a marked preoccupation in Clare's philosophical verse with futurity and the prospects for the human, post-life, as the line 'Something about me daily speaks there must' (3) demonstrates. The power and philosophical immediacy of that haunting sentence 'Is there another world for this frail dust' (1) arrests and subjugates all else. The desire for another world has become necessary and it is not a request from Clare's imagination. The empty page life refuses to write anything on about itself, or its nature, has been presented to Clare as a type of status-qua. But Clare, who finds himself

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<sup>38</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol. 4, 279.

living this world's reality on the empty page, refuses this idea of the naturalisation of emptiness. Therefore, he continues to want a different world where the coils of nothingness will not take hold of what is willing to open itself to interpretation; and what can be understood as purposefulness. The other world he believes, will not be so reticent and will not have a deficient reality that is absent from its own presence. It will have within its ontological structures, the ability to illuminate according to Shelley, 'the wonder of our Being'<sup>39</sup> rather than the mystery of life. This other world will also reacquaint the human with life, not as a renewed or re-energised entity, but life as vivaciously existing in its inconceivable possibilities. This will enable Clare to live as a meaningful existential actuality, rather than in the vacant shadows that play out on the walls of the cave. Clare's thoughts of living life outside of life and its 'close[d] sealed volume of its mystery' (7) compose a wish that is ethereal, and is steeped in his philosophical meditations. His 'instinct[s] nourish hope in vain since 'Tis Nature's prophecy that such will be' (4-5). However, his hopes for experiences outside of the present mundane fictions are not dashed because Clare knows they were never realisable. Nothing will change and 'Time wandering onward [will] keep.... it usual pace' (6). Yet, Clare is not ready to accept his existential situatedness and justifies his longing for a difference in life in a different world by using the same thread of reasoning for nature's instinct to be cyclical:

Een the small violet feels a future power  
& waits each year renewing blooms to bring

(11-12)

But man, says Clare, 'is no inferior flower' (13). To believe that man is an insignificant entity is not an idea that Clare is able to accept. He has to be much more than just being born to die

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<sup>39</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'On Life' *The Major Works including Poetry, Prose and Drama*, eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) 633-36 (633).



without knowing and experiencing what the self can be. Clare must be more than a representative of life; he must be a living embodiment of existence.

Man is worthy 'of a second spring' (14). What this immediately raises is that Clare believes that man is more than a small contained history that ends when he returns to the 'frail dust' (1). The words 'a second spring' invoke the sense of a pun, and Clare, it would seem, wants us to recognise his dual meaning and dual associations. A reading of Clare's idea of 'a second spring' as an affective renewal within the life, carries much more feasibility than a reading which calls for the acceptance of transcending death and living another life. Yet, alongside this reading, the temporal raises the matter of what lies beyond life. Has life done its duty and given the human 'the instinct to hope?' But what is there to hope for? What is operating as a second spring? The temporal and the external punctuate Clare's thinking and also cause the poem to acknowledge its own reference to the phenomena of the soul and perhaps its functioning as a 'second spring' in accordance with its immortal essence. For Clare, man will die having been an active *there being* looking for that 'something else', even if it does not exist and is only a metaphor to mark the union of Being and time.

What has been shown is how Clare, and indeed Wordsworth, engage in the philosophic without having a rigorous methodology. Therefore, when Clare is being philosophical, his philosophical thoughts do not become meaningful only when they come into contact with philosophical systems and theories. Although the philosophical Clare can be read through them as in the case of Heidegger, who articulates what Clare wishes to say existentially and ontologically with much more precision and technicality, he can also stand away from Heidegger and other philosophers and still maintain a philosophical position. As Timothy Morton has said, 'Clare does not need Descartes to stage the idea of being here.'<sup>40</sup> As he maintains his rural experience and sense of environment, Clare is permanently in

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<sup>40</sup> Timothy Morton, 'John Clare's Dark Ecology', *Studies in Romanticism*, 47.2 (2008):179-93 (188).

touch, like Wordsworth, with the human condition. The impossibility of transcending the fate of humanity, and the countervailing wish not to be measured or defined by humanity's nature of averageness, occupy Clare in some of his most philosophical verse. 'Thoughts in a Churchyard' (1825)<sup>41</sup> both characterises and translates the dimension of his thought that regards the convergence of existentialism and the science of humanity. The vocabulary of death and how the human individual is separated from all social points of reference as Being ceases and '...the bits that you were / Start speeding away from each other...' <sup>42</sup> is how Clare sets up his thinking about mortality. The theme of death as nothingness may pervade the text as Clare interprets the death of life as the attainment of peace, but, the octets defy the gloominess of the content and move with a contradictory buoyancy. It is noteworthy that Clare's existential observations exhibit a biblical importing.<sup>43</sup> In the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon outlines the basic temporal and ontological properties of what is distinctly human and the impossibility of being a reckoning force in the defeat of death. He writes:

For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything,  
neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.  
Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have  
they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun.<sup>44</sup>

'Thoughts in a Churchyard' does the same work as Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Whilst Heidegger works to centrally place *there being* in its living world, from its *thrownness* to it becoming a resolute *being-towards-death*, Clare provides a poetic account of the humaneness

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<sup>41</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol.3, 216-18.

<sup>42</sup> Philip Larkin, 'The Old Fools', *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) 196-97 (196).

<sup>43</sup> Sarah Houghton has outlined that there is much more research to be done on Clare. One area that she has identified is the books in Clare's library, what he read and how his reading of certain texts impacted his writing. See Sarah Houghton-Walker, 'John Clare and Revaluation', *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): 1-26. From his poems that affirm a belief in God and trying to practise a faith, it is quite certain that Clare ardently read the bible, hence his knowledge of its verses. See Sarah Houghton-Walker, *John Clare's Religion* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*, King James Version with Apocrypha, ed. David Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, (872).

of *Daesin*'s chronological engagement with and in the world. What can be apprehended from the surface of Clare's lines, are his feelings of justification and redemption. Clare almost seems pleased that death ends the psychological drain on the restless conscience, and he praises the peace the grave brings and the cessation of social inequality:

There rest the weary from their toil  
There lye the troubled free from care  
Who through the strife of lifes turmoil  
Sought rest & only found it there  
With none to fear his scornful brow  
There sleep the master & the slave  
& heedless of all titles now  
Repose the honoured & the brave

(9-16)

Clare continues to repeat the Jobian idea of death as a pleasing ultimate finality. He leaves nothing that could be considered as abstract in his intention to emphasise the fact that our passing is a forever passing that cannot be interrupted by 'Grief joy hope fear & all their crew' (29). The eventuality of 'the nothingness of life' cannot be deferred. Life's dualisms, good and bad, fanfare or quiet misery, come to be transcended by the 'painless blank left behind' (32). However, Clare gives no indication that this disturbs present life. This stands in antithesis to Heidegger's insistence that death must be projected onto life. For Heidegger death is to be faced, but for Clare it is to be welcomed:

Ah Hapy spot how still it seems (1)  
Lifes ignis fatus light is gone  
No more to lead their hopes astray  
Cares poisoned cup is drained & done  
& all its follis far away

...

And deaths long happy sleep is won

(33-36, 40)

Clare's poetic existential ontological thinking gives way to a more psychological musing which sees the poet reflecting on that type of memory which can no longer 'haunt the memory's living mind' (30). The intention to comment on the psychology behind psychoses and repressions that refuse to activate or retrieve the memory is not to be found in Clare's commentary on memory. When he writes, 'Where crowds of buried memory's sleep' (2), he does not mean to say the buried memories of the dead sleep since, this would carry the inference that their memories will at some point be roused once more. It is Clare's use of the word 'sleep' that points to future activity, but this is only symptomatic of Clare's use of biblical metaphor where death is referred to as sleep. When 'Life's book shuts....its pages is lost' (5), the deceased cannot and do not remember. Rather, Clare is directing his comments at life. Life, and life in its pragmatism, acts like an automaton, blotting out of its remembrance those who are not in its presence. Life is not a space for storage, 'what is gone belongs ....to "some other Being."'”<sup>45</sup>

The poetic does not stutter to bring forth the philosophical meditations in Clare. The elaborations of his inner reality that are always attempting to correspond with the dynamic of external reality are captured and are iambically and rhythmically reproduced.

What remains special in Clare is how the aesthetic is not subordinate to the philosophical. The metrical, the lyrical and the energy of poetic form always arrive but do not announce themselves. The harmony between the philosophic and the poetic does not bring about an interplay; there is not enough movement between the two. What exists is the spirit of homogeneity, a co-presence where the philosophic and the poetic are motivated to bring forth the unity of meaning and function. The utterances of how the poetic is able to discuss what is referred to as the human reality, address the moments when it is possible that the poet

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<sup>45</sup> Chilcott, 'A Real World', 246.

is able to act like the philosopher. ‘A Shadow of Life Death and Eternity’ (1822)<sup>46</sup> lends another poetic illustration that imparts Clare’s contemplations on the individual and the existential. The erection once more, of Clare in negotiations with the real, drives the anthropocentric agency of his philosophical thinking that brings into view, how Clare ‘take[s] life out of life to use it for looking at itself.’<sup>47</sup>

‘A Shadow of Life Death and Eternity’ is a discussion of Clare’s failings to become and become the truth of something. The visual diffusion of his inefficiency to turn off his ‘want’ is the poem’s definitive fullness. There is a want for sense to punctuate the experience of life, a want for the ‘....shadow moving by one’s side’ (1) to reify as something actual and a want for the hopes of life to be wishes that do come (7). Although these wants and desires are assured, they are, ‘Like skyes beneath the stream (4) / That woud as substance seem’ (2). Life is an interlude of something unknown, that expects the individual to compromise continually, with a consecutive series of obscurities and actualities until life shows itself to be ‘A blank that will remain’ (10). Despite the poem’s semantic simplicity, it is perceptive in its portrait of the existential revisions that the human individual goes through in order to realise that ‘....waiting for the hope of the morning light’ (11) impinges on the measured temporality of life. Whilst the human experiences the normative series of changes of becoming a *there being*, becoming non-descript in *The They*, becoming authentic existence, time ‘show[s] the human the depth beneath’ (14) life’s temporality. Both Heidegger and Clare write about how the individual is measured by time. But because Clare’s philosophical perspective is humanistically determined, whilst Heidegger’s is not, what we receive from Clare is not the supremacy of the imagination to shift reality according to its own inventions that is discernible in Wordsworth’s rhetoric of Romantic existential ontology. What we receive from Clare, is, the contradistinction between semblance and actuality in which the highest dwelling

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<sup>46</sup> Clare, *Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, vol. 1, 338-39.

<sup>47</sup> Antonio Porchia, *Voces*, Trans. W.S. Mervyn (Washington: Copper Caynon Press, 2003) 40.

point of the individual is located in the perceptions and conceptions of the profundity of life and existence that is beyond metaphor.

In the last stanza of the poem, Clare seems to be offering a solution to the condition whereby the 'Wave chasing wave unceasing never' (21) could be interrupted and stayed. There is in this solution, the presence of a lapsed sense of Kierkegaardian intellect; a sensibility that moves towards the idea of grasping and claiming as one's own the existence of an eternity 'That rolls in majesty for ever' (23). Clare's imagination can be seen as partaking of, and creating an ultimate order, where disunity cannot be found as even the finite and the infinite coalesce. However, this excursion into the style of the Romantic imagination is short lived since it becomes the case that 'The vaulted void of purple skye' (17) will extend to 'every were' (18). What follows for Clare is the 'thing we know not yet we' (15) reconciling all antipathies in which all agencies come to collectively recognise 'that the dark & unavoide[d] night' (9) is a shadow of life, death and eternity.

The varying co-existence of interdependence or difference between, the reality of the imagination and reality without the imagination, are significant to both Wordsworth and Clare. Yet, it is the spirit of the human that accounts for the appropriateness of designating each of them a philosopher poet. For Wordsworth, the key poetic moments are those which encourage life to be lived in close proximity to the environment in which life is lived. For Clare, his philosophical verse brings out the significance of ontology, illuminating the meaning of human ordinariness.

## Conclusion

In Clare's poetry, the self-evident or rather distinctive character of what Hegel, when writing about 'Being pure Being',<sup>1</sup> refers to as 'indeterminate immediacy'<sup>2</sup> becomes visible. It is from this perspective that the thesis has stated that Clare was a poet of Being and not a systematic philosopher. Philosophers use their intellect, experience, an established philosophical discipline or their rhetorical skills to think about and comment upon the universe, the world, society or the meaning of life. Clare's poetry creates for itself its own ontology. The thesis has sought to distinguish between philosophical poetry and poetry of Being in Clare. It has argued too, that Clare's poetic thinking speaks of 'the unconcealedness of what is.'<sup>3</sup> Hence, the poet's movement between the ontological sites of the existential and the poetic, makes possible the idea of an organic unity of Being within his poetry.

It has been shown that poetry for Martin Heidegger 'is not an aimless imagining of whimsicalities and not a flight of mere notions and fancies into the realm of the unreal.'<sup>4</sup> Rather, poetry is the 'projective saying'<sup>5</sup> of Being and an occurrence that is never to be established and stabilised. But in poetry, it can be caught, seen, known and experienced, unfixed. Nevertheless, to see Being as a thing is a limited approach. Being must be spoken and this, for Heidegger, is the natural art of poetry. For Heidegger, poetry is the founding of Being because poets use language that becomes and 'remains truly a word.'<sup>6</sup> Clare's poetry reveals the creativity of Being as an art form. As a result, his poetry is *essential* poetry

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Trans. W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers, 2 vols (vol.1) (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951) 94. First Published in German 1812-16 under the title, *Wissenschaft der Logik*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Origins of the Work of Art' *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 74. Hereafter, 'OWA.'

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, 'OWA', 72.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

because it creates an *Open* or moves into *the Open*; it acts as a means for the articulation of poetic *what-ness* and *this-ness* together with the contemplation of the human condition and its related questions.

When contemplating human Being, the poetry in which Clare thinks about life and interlinks the experiential with nature, moves beyond the descriptive to deal with feeling and purpose. From the haunting and sometimes anguished voice in poems that span his entire career (not simply the brutal poetry of existence brought out of the asylum), what is discernible, is that Clare always understood human feeling through the cruel vicissitudes of life. His capacity to respond to the otherness of different ontological moods, and to feel the persistent strangeness of his own existence, is productively evident in his work. His uniqueness and remarkableness, I believe, lie in his ability to use poetry to represent quite different states of being and becoming: wordlessness, fragmentation, detachment from the Self while always remaining a poet.

What this thesis has gleaned from Clare and sanctioned as a discourse is, as Ferencei-Gossetti writes, a poetics of *Dasein*<sup>7</sup> coupled with poetry which has an ontological and ontical texture. Clare's poetics of *Dasein* unaffectedly invokes and embraces the reality of 'being here' and the freedom to be. The affinities between Clare as an ontological poet and the thinking of Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927) and *Poetry, Language, Thought*, (1975) have proved illuminating. Heidegger provides a language for Clare's enquiries into human Being and the coming forth of his poetry. However, it is evident that Heideggerian discourse does not always aid understanding of those moments in Clare when the raw and open perturbations of world weariness cannot say, speak or vitalise what Clare is feeling. Certainly, there are many areas in which there is no consonance between John Clare and Martin Heidegger. Most notable is the doctrine of theism that is to be found in Clare's

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<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy 38 (New York: Fordham UP, 2004).



appeals for meaning regarding existence. In addition, Clare's observations of human behaviour and its psychology do not always find a tallying explanation in Heidegger. The philosopher does not include an appeal to scientific disciplines such as anthropology, psychology or biology in his account of *Dasein*.<sup>8</sup> Heidegger is not concerned to discuss or explain *being-in-Being* outside of a fundamental ontology. An existential phenomenological analysis of *Dasein*, its relationship to *being-in-the-world* and Others set in and against time, comprehended through the rigours of ontology, was Heidegger's single endeavour. He writes, 'Life is not a mere Being-present-at-hand<sup>9</sup>, nor is it *Dasein*. In turn, *Dasein* is never to be defined ontologically by regarding it as life.....'<sup>10</sup>

The authority and rigidity of philosophy is one of dominance and grounding. Yet, Heidegger's poetic writings help to dispel the idea of philosophy and poetry as two disciplines that antagonise one another. The analysis of Clare's poetic *saying* through Heidegger's later ontological thought, has privileged the natural and the organic and placed as secondary, the rigour of conceptual approaches. Discussing Clare within a Heideggerian context has demonstrated that philosophy is able to accentuate the visible and conscious trace of the unfamiliar in Clare. Clare's poetic thinking and ontological pluralities illustrate the truth that poetry leads to *the Open*, that place which makes manifest 'the happening of truth.'<sup>11</sup> When the individual asks it fundamentally human questions, Clare's existential poetry demonstrates how *essential* poetry responds. The poetry trades in being an audible translation of humanity's dialogue with what it means to be human and *Dasein*'s ontological 'how.'

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<sup>8</sup> Please see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 71:46-77:55 for Heidegger's explanation as to why these disciplines are omitted, namely because an investigation into *Dasein* is the principal of the ontological question.

<sup>9</sup> *Present-at hand* is an attitude that describes existing in a neutral space without any particular mood or subjectivity. However, for Heidegger, it is not completely disinterested or neutral. It has a mood, and is part of the metaphysics of presence that tends to level all things down, including *Dasein*.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 75:50.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, 'OWA', 70.

Despite its idiosyncrasies of punctuation, parochialisms, and grammar, Clare's poetry can be understood as a representation of Being's mode of being. Helen Vendler writing in *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*,<sup>12</sup> discusses poetry's affinity with existence. 'Poems' she remarks, 'have their origins in life'<sup>13</sup> and 'Life is a continuation of successive moments in one stream.'<sup>14</sup> Wallace Stevens, however, reminds us of the restraints that literature places upon what can be classed as reality and what at best, can only subscribe to the mimetic: 'The dream of a wholly naked encounter with reality, without the interposition of language, is always frustrated by entanglement in a "fictive covering."'<sup>15</sup>

Yet, it is literariness which enables the representation of life in literature to be presented 'not in shadow but in reality.'<sup>16</sup> As Heidegger explicates in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, poetry opens up possibilities of human existence because it leads the individual to remember Being. Clare's words are not only pictures of reality; they are indeed part of the thing, tangled inextricably with the event they are describing. Within Clare's poetry, the words are in the saying and become 'the are' and 'the is' of the subject. Clare's diction inaugurates the translation of words back into their etymological meaning in a quasi-metaphysical way. Clare's poetry speaks what it means to be, 'the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.'<sup>17</sup> It is a recuperative agent of what can be forever lost in language that connects, and thereafter, will seek a reconnection with a meaningful correspondence with what lies inside, behind or beyond words. Thus, it is not too excessive to

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<sup>12</sup> Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Winifred Nowotny, *The Language Poets Use* (London: Athlone Press, 1962; 1965) 104.

<sup>16</sup> John Clare, *The Prose of John Clare*, eds. J W and Anne Tibble (London: Kegan Paul-Routledge 1951) 224-25.

<sup>17</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works including Poetry, Prose and Drama*, eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) 679.

claim that Clare's existential poetry, is a vision of human nature according to the *sayable* idiom that stems from a living life, and what we are.

Alongside the mirroring of what Heidegger has identified as 'the necessary part of the poet's nature...',<sup>18</sup> which, is to bring attention to Being, Clare's 'technical accomplishment', his 'range of styles', and his 'distinctiveness of voice and visionary power' are, according to Jonathan Bate, 'unmatched by any one of his class before or since.'<sup>19</sup> Bate's enlightened judgement of Clare has helped to increase the awareness of Clare as an English poet. The interpretation in this thesis of Clare as a poet of Being, who accommodates the presentation of what is, and the apprehension of life, also allows for Clare to be discussed outside thought of him as a peasant poet or 'minor poet.' The idea that he is a 'minor poet' is contested by the thesis; it is an idea that stems from critics who make value judgements and comparisons upon Clare according to the ideology of Romanticism, and who consequently miss what is unique to Clare and his poetic consciousness. Whilst Clare has momentarily shown that he is capable of indulging in the visionary like Shelley, being as aesthetically beautiful as Keats and thinking philosophically like Wordsworth, L. J. Swingle needs to be heeded when he outlines what he believes to be the only productive way to read Clare:

....we best learn to appreciate the nature of Clare's poetic achievement by seeking to judge him according to his own axioms. Instead of searching for Blake or Wordsworth or Keats in Clare in order to affirm, "Clare also does this!" we need to search for Clare in Clare, so to affirm, "Clare distinctively does this!"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, 'What are Poets For?', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 91-142 (94).

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador-Pan Macmillan, 2004) 546.

<sup>20</sup> L.J. Swingle, 'Stalking the Essential John Clare: Clare in Relation to His Romantic Contemporaries' *Studies in Romanticism* 14.3 (1975): 273-84 (274).

What Clare does, is use the artistry of Being to celebrate the ontology of nature and the ontology of the thing. Clare's poem 'Emmonsales Heath' (1823)<sup>21</sup> illustrates this point. Aside from documenting the manifold variety of pleasures the heath's 'wild garb' (1) affords, the poem 'suspends its own process, to hold natural life for ever within the greenness and freshness of its birth.'<sup>22</sup> The poem is able to be representative of Clare's poetry which, in its self-sufficient eloquence, parallels 'nature's wide and common sky' (87) with the aestheticism of a pure presentness.

The exploration of Clare through politics<sup>23</sup>, social consciousness<sup>24</sup>, religion<sup>25</sup> the idea of landscape and the emergence of a different poetic voice and diction,<sup>26</sup> and through the plethora of disciplines his nature writing appeals to, shows that there is still much to be said and thought about Clare. These, and other critical perspectives, serve to move him away from his 'seductive'<sup>27</sup> biography and present him to new readers as a challenging and rewarding poet. Discussing the philosophical dimension of his work demonstrates the ability of Clare's poetry to continue to inhabit multi interdisciplinary sites. The thesis has moved away from presenting Clare as a poet who is locked into traditional and accepted perspectives. Clare's movement between two ontological sites, (the pure ontological status of his nature poems and his portrayal of *being-in-the-world*), is indicative of a comprehensive participation in the idea of Being. These considerations, a century later, have been provided with a more sophisticated language by a philosopher who could put into the *sayable*, the existential and ontological expressions evoked by Clare and his poetry. However, being philosophically aligned to

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<sup>21</sup> John Clare, *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822*, vol.3, eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 363-67.

<sup>22</sup> Tim Chilcott, 'A Real World & Doubting Mind': *A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull UP, 1985) 120.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Vardy, *John Clare Politics and Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Johanne Clare, *John Clare and the Bounds of Circumstance*, Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1987.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Houghton-Walker, *John Clare's Religion* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (London: Cambridge UP, 1972).

<sup>27</sup> Sarah M. Zimmerman, 'Accounting for Clare', *College English*, 62.3 (2000): 317-34 (317).

Heidegger has not required uncorrelated acts of appropriation. It is Clare's poetic thinking that draws Being into its own created spaces, independently revealing him as a poet of Being.

Clare's ontological poetry has presented him to the Clare reader from a more profound plane from which he can be read.

## ***Glossary of Heideggerian Terms***

### ***A Clearing***

In German, the word *Lichtung* means a clearing, as in for example, a clearing in the woods. Since its root is the German word for light (*Licht*), it is sometimes also translated as ‘lighting’ and in Heidegger’s work it refers to the necessity of a clearing in which anything at all can appear, *the clearing* in which some thing or idea can show itself, or be unconcealed. This relates to *aletheia* and the concept of disclosure.

### ***Dasein***

*Dasein* is one of the core terms in *Being and Time*. It can be simply defined as entity that is conscious of the meaning of its own existence. In practical terms, this means the human Being is *Dasein* and literally means being there (German: *Da* - there; *Sein* - Being). Heidegger interchanges the term as being-there or there-being.

### ***Ereignis***

*Ereignis* is translated often as ‘an event,’ but is better understood in terms of something ‘coming into view.’

### ***Everydayness***

The ontological mood of *Dasein* or, its way to be in the world during which it does not think about its existence because it is pre-occupied with the world and the things of the world.

*Dasein* tends to exist inauthentically in ‘*The They*’ without being confronted about its potential to live an authentic existence, projecting its own individual possibilities.

### ***(Ontological) Existentialia and Existentiell***

An Existentialia (plural, Existentialia) is a concept that explains ontological characteristics of *Dasein* which is revealed by the analysis of its existence. An existentialia concerns *Dasein*'s residing in and alongside the world. These terms are necessary for Heidegger to distinguish between the existential structure of *Dasein* and the concept of a mere category. An Existentialia makes plain some of the impressions of Being which *Dasein* has in its existential ontological structure such as Care and concern. Using the existentialia we may discern some notable patterns in the manifold impressions of Being which help to articulate the phenomenological manifestations of the Being of *Dasein*.

### ***Existentiell***

This refers to *Dasein*'s understanding of its own existence. For an individual *Dasein*, ‘the question of existence never gets clarified except through existing.’ (12:33 in *Being and Time*). The understanding of oneself that it (we) acquire along the way is what Heidegger calls ‘*existentiell*.’

### ***Gelassenheit***

Heidegger acknowledged that his use of *Gelassenheit* was inspired by Meister Eckhart. The theme has its roots in Eckhart's themes of will and detachment. Heidegger uses the term to refer to the essence of thinking, a thinking that is not intended as representing a self-

determining thinking, but is conceptualized as “meditative thinking.” Meditative thinking is the kind of thinking that thinks the truth of Being, that belongs to Being and listens to it. Often translated as ‘releasement,’ Heidegger has described *Gelassenheit* as ‘the spirit of what is available before the ‘*What-Is*’, which permits us simply, to let things be in whatever may be their uncertainty and their mystery. The term is chiefly used and discussed in detail in Heidegger’s ‘Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking’ in *Discourse on Thinking*, Trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

### ***Publicness***

The way in which *Dasein* becomes interpreted in every day practices in the world with Others. *Publicness* is also the every-day practices *Dasein* indulges in to cope with public norms; what *Dasein* ‘normally does.’ In essence, it is the everyday significance and intelligibility *Dasein* uses to cope with public roles and norms.

### ***Ontic/Ontical***

Heidegger uses the term ontic, often in contrast to the term ontological. The ontic provides descriptive characteristics of a particular thing usually objects, and the plain facts of their existence.

### ***Ontological Mood***

The ontological states of minds rather than psychological moods of *Dasein* after it is thrown into its Being. A mood makes manifest ‘how one is’ and how *Dasein* finds itself in the world and towards its Being attuned. Moods are the fundamental ways in which we respond to



being in Being and the world. We are always caught up in our everyday life in the world, in the throw of various moods, whether fear, boredom, excitement or anxiety.

### ***The Open***

When the essence of a thing or work of art is exposed either through a new interpretation far removed from critiques or through representational thinking. As a result, and after Openness, the thing or the work of art lets itself be a thing or a work in *The Open*.

### ***Seiendheit***

*Seiendheit* is a being, according to Heidegger but a being understood more the verbal sense of *das Seiend* (retaining an aspect of dynamic appearing) than in the later static, substantive metaphysical sense, which he refers to simply as *das Seiende*. When Heidegger speaks of *Seiendheit*, in his ontological applications, he assigns *Seiendheit* with the meaning ‘the being’, ‘the realness’ or ‘the presentness of entities.’<sup>28</sup>

### ***The They***

The term ‘*The They*’ derives from the impersonal singular pronoun *man* (‘on’, as distinct from ‘I’, or ‘you’, or ‘he’ or ‘she’, or ‘they’). Known in German as *das man* both the German *man* and the English ‘one’ are neutral or indeterminate in respect of gender and, even, in a sense, of number, though both words suggest an unspecified, unspecifiable, indeterminate plurality. Heidegger refers to this concept of ‘*The They*’ or *the One* in explaining inauthentic modes of existence, in which *Dasein*, instead of truly choosing to do something, does it only

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<sup>28</sup> The explanation of the term *Seiendheit* and the subsequent synonyms for the term have been sourced from Richard M Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2010) 5.

because ‘That is what one does’ or ‘That is what people do.’ Thus, *das Man* is not a proper or measurable entity, but rather an amorphous part of social reality that functions effectively in the manner that it does through this intangibility.

Heidegger refers to this concept of ‘*The They*’ when explaining inauthentic modes of existence. ‘*The They*’ constitutes a possibility of *Dasein*’s Being, and so ‘*The They*’ cannot be said to be any particular someone. Rather, the existence of ‘*The They*’ is known to us through, for example, linguistic conventions and social norms. Heidegger states that, ‘*The They*’ prescribes one’s state-of-mind, and determines what and how one ‘sees.’

### ***Thrownness***

This is the term which describes *Dasein* being thrown into the ‘there’ of its Being and *being-in-the-world*. Thrownness (Geworfenheit) is the simple awareness that we always find ourselves somewhere, namely delivered over to a world with which we are fascinated, a world we share with others. The world matters to us. The term could also be described as *Dasein* already finding-itself-in-its-there-ness.

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